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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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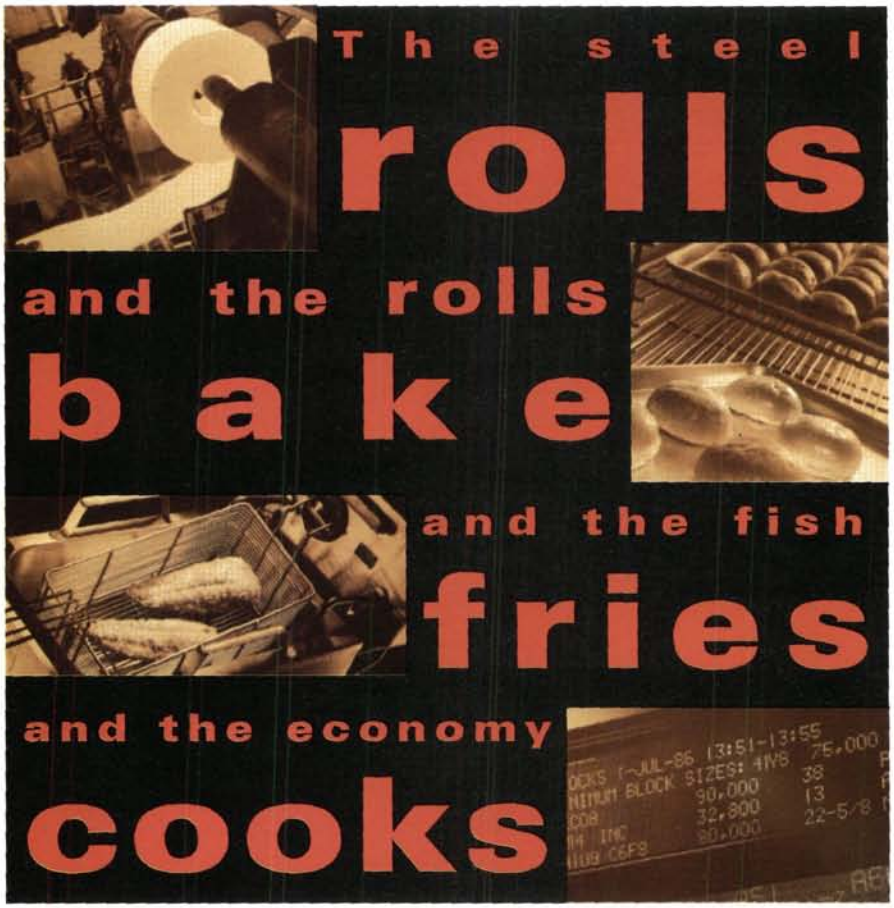


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# THE NEW REPUBLIC

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**SEPTEMBER 30, 1996**

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**Cover by Eric Baker for THE NEW REPUBLIC. Illustration by Stephen Kroninger. Article on page 24.**


4 **CORRESPONDENCE** Is everything terrifying terrorism? Failing self-esteem &c.

6 **JOHN B. JUDIS** TRB: BAD CHOICE Will Dole's voucher plan do harm, or nothing at all?

7 **THE EDITORS** OPERATION DESERT PRICK Our pretend response to Saddam.

8 **NOTEBOOK** Who needs Cairo? Bob Dole's silly IRS-bashing &c.

10 **DAVID SAMUELS** NEW JERSEY POSTCARD: SUCCESS 1996 Cuomo after all these years.

11 **JACOB HEILBRUNN** THE CASE FOR IRAN Our enemy's enemy is, let's face it, our friend.

12 **MATTHEW DALLEK** PATH FROM POWER How Roger Morris discovered corruption.

16 **MATTHEW MILLER** WAGE WAR Two things are clear: we know why inequality is rising, and we know the candidates won't talk about it. A proposal.

20 **ROGER SIMON** THE AIR WAR Politicos versus the press on the Dole plane.

24 **MICHAEL LEWIS** CAMPAIGN JOURNAL: COMMON GROUND With millionaires in Chicago, a wounded gangsta rapper in Las Vegas and a street-level entrepreneur in New York, where the election doesn't matter in all the same ways.

29 **JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN** THE HARD QUESTIONS: SENSE AND SENSIBILITY Our pity culture.

30 **STANLEY KAUFFMANN** ON FILMS: REVELATIONS The fiction of *Secrets & Lies* convinces more easily than the choppy truth of *Paradise Lost.*

32 **JAMES WOOD** REAL ABSENCES *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1995* by George Steiner

36 **C.K. WILLIAMS** POEM *Proof*

38 **CASS R. SUNSTEIN** THE MYSTERY OF PROGRESS *India: Economic Development and Opportunity* by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen

42 **GERALD EARLY** PASSION FLOWER *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn* by David Hajdu

46 **MARTIN PERETZ** TELLURIDE DIARIST: CAMERA READY



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# CORRESPONDENCE

## See no evil

**To the editors:**

Having just seen *Independence Day* (under the pretense of accompanying my kids), it is easy to explain Bob Dole's confusion upon emerging from the screening ("California, Here They Come," August 19 & 26). Since Michael Lewis reported that Dole's reaction was scripted "before" seeing the movies, it is clear that those who scripted his response did so before seeing the movie as well.

The Dole campaign chose this movie as "an example of a major motion picture that makes money but preserves the notion of patriotism, mankind coming together and the fight between good and evil." These elements were clearly present, but what exactly did those evil aliens stand for? They were not necessarily a superior life form, but their advances in technology (weaponry and armor) gave them an advantage over the earthlings. The president, in a moment of agonizing telepathic insight, saw that the aliens' intention was to go from world to world exterminating the inhabitants and consuming natural resources. And the Jewish hacker harped continuously on the environmental issue. The representation of "evil" as the destruction of the environment and native people by an insatiable, consumption-obsessed, technologically advanced society hardly reflects the Republican platform.

VICTOR J. FRIEDMAN
*Ruppin Institute, Israel*

## Back to school

**To the editors:**

Regarding Richard Weissbourd's comments on self-esteem ("The Feel-Good Trap," August 19 & 26): I do not know how many classrooms Weissbourd has been in recently, but I have been a classroom teacher for almost forty years and visit schools in four counties yearly on a professional basis. I have never heard self-esteem preached as a "movement" (my heavens!) or practiced as an omnipresent exercise in "praising" and a "metasolution" (wow!) for every problem in the school. Does he really think teachers are so naïve as to view self-esteem as a "short cut" aimed at replacing relationships with parents or so obtuse they cannot distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate praise? Does he think that such "critical faculties" as "persistence" and "the capacity to handle shame and disappointment" are unrelated to self-esteem or self concept? Urban teachers cite with anguish the same problems that Weissbourd recognizes, and I have seen them instinctively and warmly use self-esteem approaches as the only means available. Teachers in affluent suburban schools use it much more selectively for obvious reasons.

Part of Weissbourd's problem might be that he uses John Leo—the old religious editor from *Commonweal* and *The New York Times*—as a source. He should try some elementary teachers and special education teachers.

WILLIAM W. GOETZ
*Oradell, New Jersey*

DAVID RIEFF: BURUNDI, BLOODY BURUNDI
THE
NEW REPUBLIC
Brustein skewers August Wilson • Glazer salutes the cities • 1968 remembered
SAN DIEGO ZOO
John Judis • Michael Lewis
Sean Wilentz • Hanna Rosin • Jim Sleeper
ON THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION

## Terror campaign

**To the editors:**

It has been laziness, and maybe worse, on the part of the media to immediately label any fear-inducing explosion as "terrorism." An event is only "terrorism" if the perpetrator did it with the intent to induce fear into a defined population. All bombings are terrifying, but they aren't all terrorism. If a person sets a bomb on a plane, it might be an attempt to murder a particular passenger, or sabotage against the airline, or just a berserk science experiment. None of these are terrorism. Likewise, some sociopath could set a bomb in a garbage can at a major global gathering, and it might just be out of a sickening variety of prankstersism or an attempt to create a crisis from which the perpetrator will emerge a hero. That's not terrorism, either.

Thus it was dismaying to read TNR's Notebook item "Bombs" (August 19 & 26), which equated the World Trade Center, Oklahoma City, TWA flight 800 and the Atlanta Centennial Park bombing. This is absurd. They are similar only in that they involved explosives and innocent people were killed. The first two were clearly terrorism, i.e., the bombers intended to induce fear in the public rather than, say, murder some specific person within those buildings; the latter two have *never* been more likely than not to be terrorism as opposed to any other possible explanation. Yet, the media rush to lump them all together.

If we were more sophisticated about the distinction between terrorism and other acts that happen to instill fear, namely the intent of the perpetrator, it would have at least two effects. First, there would be less rampant irrational fear in the wake of similar tragedies, fanned by the media. Second, as a result of the first, terrorists would not have as much power to send the public into a panic and governments into frenzied activity, and thus possibly less incentive to try.

RICHARD P. MATTHEWS
*San Francisco, California*

## Separate dramas

**To the editors:**

Robert Brustein is absolutely right in taking August Wilson to task for demanding that white foundations fund and create black theaters ("Subsidized Separatism," August 19 & 26). Such an idea casts African Americans in the too-familiar role of dependency and weakness. This country has seen too much of that and consequently should never see it again.

I just have to ask, what is wrong with Wilson's saying that the ground on which he stands was pioneered by people like Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey and Marcus Garvey? They are heroes to African Americans. The fact that they are rebels or separatists means nothing.

And, in the face of white flight, Brustein is more than a little hypocritical in talking about the language of self-segregation coming from Wilson and decrying it. What black ghetto has Brustein integrated? Integration, particularly among black people, is coming to be discredited—being seen as a concept rooted in white supremacy. Where are the private schools founded and administered by black people in integrated neighborhoods, and where are the white parents that send their children to them? Where are the banks owned by blacks in integrated neighborhoods and the whites who have accounts with them? Wilson is only suggesting that integration is outdated for black people and that new concepts, created by and for blacks, are necessary.



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If high standards come out of Europe or from white people, what is wrong with black artists and writers developing standards and criteria of their own, yes, separate from those who do not share their slave history, their Jim Crow experiences, the second-class citizen realities? If Brustein suggests that doing so is separatism without making that same accusation of other standards and criteria not developed by blacks then he is promoting white supremacy. No black person wants integration with that. We have seen what it looks like already.

ED ROUCE III
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

## Lamm chops

**To the editors:**

John B. Judis in "B.S. Agenda" (August 5) takes former Reform Party presidential hopeful Richard Lamm to task for allegedly playing slipshod with the facts on Social Security. He claims, for example, that Social Security faces no more than a minor funding shortfall, and that young people are getting a fair shake. None of this is true, of course. And, when Judis declares that workers are "funding their own retirement through Social Security taxes," it's not even clear whether he expects to be taken seriously.

Judis makes a big deal out of the official projection that the Social Security trust fund will be "solvent" until 2029. This is the date when, if all goes well, the trust fund will have exhausted its "surplus." What he neglects to mention is that, in order to spend any of this surplus, the government will have to cut other spending, run higher deficits or hike taxes. In other words, the funding crunch begins in the year that benefit outlays exceed earmarked tax revenues. Officially, these operating deficits are projected to begin in 2012, wage growth will have to average about 1 percent annually—more than double its average since 1973. Under SSA's "high cost" projection, which includes a mild recession later this decade, the trust fund will begin running operating deficits in 2000.

Likewise, Lamm's concerns about generational equity are more sophisticated than Judis suggests. According to the Urban Institute's Eugene Steuerle, the deal Social Security offers new retirees is already poor and getting worse fast. Lamm proposes to redress this inequity with his National Thrift Plan proposal to transform Social Security into a funded system of personal thrift accounts—without denying benefits to current retirees or abandoning the progressivity of the current system. Lamm's view, shared by the World Bank, is that the surest way to boost wages and provide retirement security for the next century's elderly is to increase household retirement savings.

By contrast, Judis suggests an immediate 2.2 percent payroll tax hike. Such a fix might stave off operating deficits for another eight years, but it would do little to improve national savings. And it would worsen rates of return for the young.

PAUL S. HEWITT
*Executive director, National Taxpayers Union Foundation*
*Washington, D.C.*

**John B. Judis replies:**

As I explained in my column, former Social Security Commissioner Robert Ball has argued that the Social Security shortfall after 2030 could be met by a 2 percent payroll tax increase (1 percent on employees) in the year 2050 (!) and by allocating 40 percent of the trust fund to equity purchases. I cited the 2.2 percent figure as well merely to show that Social Security does not face the kind of imminent crisis that Medicare does. It doesn't. Social Security will pay for itself until 2030. If other programs will not, then we should either cut them or raise taxes rather than crowing about a crisis of Social Security.

## Desert shields

**To the editors:**

My sincerest sympathies to Matthew Miller, who must now attempt to write national political commentary while residing in the cerebral desert of Los Angeles ("Deficit, Schmeficit," August 19 & 26). Eastern intellectual that he is, I am sure Miller is well aware that one of the nation's greatest political commentators, Will Rogers, managed to overcome this obstacle while residing only a mile or so from the never-never land of Pacific Palisades that Miller describes.

If he should fail this Herculean task, or be overcome by his fear of losing I.Q., Miller could always decide to leave Los Angeles and return to Washington. If so, to paraphrase Rogers, I suspect that he would probably raise the average I.Q. of both places.

DANIEL J. STONE
*Los Angeles, California*

## Graduate school

**To the editors:**

Jim Sleeper used the words "...Colin Powell, who graduated City College..." in his article "Working Girl" (August 19 & 26). Ugh! City College graduated Powell, not the other way around.

JUDY BARRETT
*Via the Internet*


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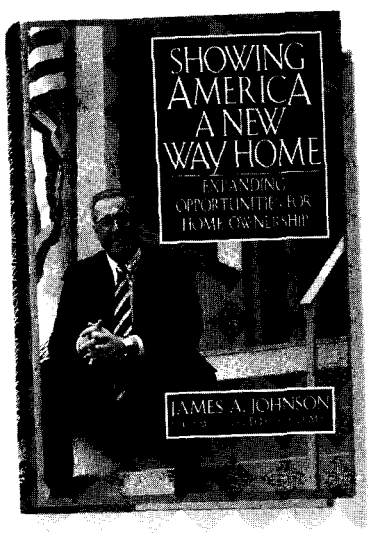


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## FROM WASHINGTON

# Bad choice

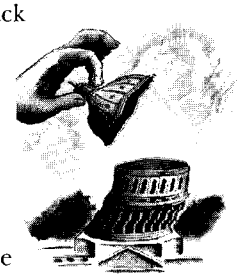
Bob Dole's plan for improving education is "school choice." "There is no reason why those who live on any street in America should not have the same right as the person who lives at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue—the right to send your child to the school of your choice," Dole declared in his acceptance speech. Sounds good, but Dole's program won't grant that right, and the issue of school choice is much more complicated.

There are at least four different kinds of plans out there. They range from Minnesota's public school choice program to the universal voucher system favored by conservatives at the Heritage and Bradley Foundations. In their effect on education, they vary from the creative to the innocuous to the pernicious. The results of Dole's own plan would be somewhere between the second and third.

*Public School Choice*: The idea dates from the late 1960s, when districts set up magnet schools to attract white students to black areas. In the last decade, several states, beginning with Minnesota, as well as numerous cities and towns, have established comprehensive programs that allow students to choose schools within and even outside their districts. By fostering competition among schools, choice ideally encourages each school to improve and adapt to the needs of local students. It also helps weed out incompetent principals. The danger is that, if it fails, it promotes greater segregation by race and class. For this reason, most school systems that have adopted this kind of school choice have set limits on segregation and have informed low-income parents of their options. Miracles have not occurred. Minneapolis's school system is still a mess, but Cambridge, Massachusetts, and East Harlem, New York, have both benefited.

*Charter Schools*: Since the late '60s, many states and school districts have also funded alternative schools set up by parents, teachers and non-profit corporations. The latest version of these are charter schools, which have been established in twenty-five states. They function like public school choice, encouraging schools to adapt to communities' special needs. Their drawback is similar to that of magnet schools. They can siphon off the strongest teachers and students without improving the overall system. Moreover, they often fall prey to educational entrepreneurs who want to privatize education for profit. The efforts of these pedagogical profiteers have not been impressive. A report this year by the General Accounting Office found no evidence of academic improvement among students served by four of the new for-profit educational management institutions.

*Low-income Vouchers*: In Milwaukee and Cleveland, black Democrats and white Republicans have banded together to provide vouchers for low-income students to attend private schools. These pilot programs assume that local school administrators are incapable of improving the inner-city public schools. In the short run, they reason, students need to go outside the public system entirely. And, in the long run, the public schools need the shock of competition from the outside. As experimental, emergency measures, these voucher programs are worth attempting—as long as funds for vouchers are not simply moved out of public schools into private schools. So far the results of the Milwaukee experiment have been, at best, mixed. The private schools are undersubscribed, their dropout rate is high, and test scores have not exceeded those of comparable public school students. (Those voucher enthusiasts cheered by the recent study from Harvard and Houston University researchers claiming significant improvement for students newly enrolled in private schools should read the convincing rebuttal by the University of Wisconsin's John Witte. It's available at http://dpls.dacc.wisc.edu/choice/choice_index.html.)



*Universal Vouchers*: Economist Milton Friedman first proposed a universal system of vouchers in 1955. It would allocate funds to schools—public, private or religious—based entirely on their enrollment. Some voucher proponents have constructed highly regulated schemes that require private schools to act like "public" schools—they would have to accept, for instance, vouchers as full tuition payment—but Friedman and most conservative proponents see vouchers as a way to escape regulation of education entirely. And they envision low-income vouchers as a step toward such a system. If a voucher system "is good public policy for the poor," Michael Joyce of the Bradley Foundation told *The Toledo Blade*, "why isn't it good public policy for middle- or higher-income wage earners?"

Because it could lead to unmitigated disaster. If public spending on education remained constant, then it would mean taking funds from public schools to subsidize the most exclusive private schools, sectarian religious schools and even parental home-schoolers. The school system would abandon entirely its communal, integrative role. It could come to resemble Americans' health care system at its worst: at the top, the equivalent of fancy fee-for-service surgeons catering only to investment bankers and oil sheiks, in the middle mediocre HMOs—or EMOs—more concerned about profit than service, and at the bottom the educational equivalent of storefront Medicaid mills and decrepit public hospitals.

Could it happen? There has already been a test case. In 1980, Friedman's disciples convinced Chile's Pinochet government to adopt a fully deregulated voucher system. As Stanford professor Martin Carnoy has reported, class differences in education exploded. Most poor Chileans remained in the public system while the middle and upper classes opted for private schools. Test scores of lower-income students (whether in private or public schools) plummeted from 1982 to 1988, while those of middle- and upper-income students rose slightly. Chile's new government has since had to "reform" this voucher system.

Dole's school choice plan is a political ploy poised between Milwaukee and Santiago. The money for it will be taken out of existing federal and state funds for public education. He says it is for lower- and middle-income students, but it provides scholarships of only $1,000-$1,500 a year—not enough for lower-income students to meet the costs of private school tuition. It's not an education program directed at troubled schools or students. It's simply a tax subsidy—achieved through a transfer of public funds from one group of taxpayers (public school parents) to another (private school parents). It might win the hearts of the Christian Coalition or the Catholic dioceses in Cleveland or Milwaukee, but it won't give all Americans "the right to send your child to the school of your choice."

**JOHN B. JUDIS**



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THE NEW REPUBLIC

SEPTEMBER 30, 1996

# OPERATION DESERT PRICK

This time around Bill Clinton is running for president as the internationalist, the foreign policy wonk, the commander-in-chief; and so it was especially remarkable that, in the middle of the campaign and as a response to a threat that came as no surprise, the administration broke new ground in strategic incoherence.

After Saddam Hussein dispatched between 25,000 and 40,000 troops to the city of Irbil, to exploit a small war between two groups of Kurds, the United States rained forty-four cruise missiles on Iraq's air defenses in Tallil, Nasiriya, Kut and Iskandariya and extended the no-fly zone against Saddam by sixty miles, from the 32nd parallel to the 33rd parallel. Way to go! And many polled Americans thought so, too. But look again. Tallil, Nasiriya, Kut and Iskandariya are in the south. Irbil is in the north. Saddam's adventure took place on the ground. The no-fly zone takes place in the air.

The American action was not disproportionate. It was dissociated. It was a week, then, in which both Bill Clinton and Saddam Hussein attained their objectives. The former showed what now passes for true grit and blunted his opponent's advantage on the subject of war. (Bob Dole has no advantage, though, on the subject of Iraq, of which he was a great appeaser.) The latter demonstrated the recuperation of his military strength, established tight control over the troublesome northern region of his country, enjoyed the spectacle of America's allies in Europe, Russia and the Middle East (except Israel and Britain) running for rhetorical cover or worse, and generally improved his image as the tribune of the downtrodden, anti-imperialist peoples of the world.

The president said that Saddam's actions in northern Iraq "required a strong response and they have received one." Strictly speaking, they received no response at all. The president also said that Iraq was now "strategically worse off." It is hard to see how. Iraqi planes can no longer fly the sixty miles south of Baghdad; but Iraq's air force is the weakest and least worrisome element of its arsenal, the only part of its arsenal that seems to have been crippled by Operation Desert Storm for the long term. Iraq's land forces are another story. They have recovered, lean but no less mean, from the debacle of 1991. The Republican Guards comprise eight divisions, four in the north and four in the south, amounting to 32,000 troops. These are the troops whom Colin Powell cut off but did not kill. (He really should retire his cute, false slogan.) And Saddam also has 30,000 more elite troops, special forces known as Saddam's Commandos, at his disposal. He remains in possession of chemical and biological weapons. He is one of the primary beneficiaries of the deranged post-cold war arms market, displaying a special appetite for missile technology.

And one other thing. All these instruments of war are in the hands of a man about whose willingness to use them there is no need to speculate. He has already used them all. The murder of Kurds by chemical weapons, the invasion of Kuwait, the missile attacks on Israel, the massacres of Kurds and Shiites: the evidence of this dictator's ruthlessness is plain. (And we are no longer exactly moved by the romantic nationalism of Kurds who invite into their midst the man who poisoned their women and children.) Saddam's lack of any moral inhibition, which he disguises with Muslim piety, is almost clinically interesting. It is also strategically interesting. It means that the only solution to the threat posed by Saddam is the overthrow of Saddam.

But this is precisely the conclusion to which pinpricking American planners in the Clinton administration, as in the Bush administration, refuse to be drawn. When asked last week whether we should "get [Saddam] out of the picture," John Deutch patiently explained that assassination was against American law, as if that answered the question. Colin Powell proudly told CNN that it was never an aim of Operation Desert Storm to depose Saddam. "I have never quite seen a Saddam Thomas Jefferson Hussein standing in the wings," was Powell's smartass comment. It would be lovely, of course, if Iraq were ruled by a democrat. But a ruler in Baghdad who was not regularly guilty of atrocities and invasions would also be nothing to sneeze at. The truth is that the United States, in 1991 and in 1996, is exercised by only one of the many dangers that Saddam poses, and that is the danger to oil. The Kurds are in the north, but the oil fields are in the south; and it is the oil fields of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (the latter deafeningly silent) that the no-fly zone is designed to protect.

Saddam will not desist. He will almost certainly retaliate against American targets soon. And what then? Will we head for Baghdad or for Brussels? It was a good sign that we acted alone last week. It was a bad sign that we acted preposterously. •



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# NOTEBOOK

A SUMMIT LESS THAN ITS PARTS: In London last week, meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, Secretary of State Warren Christopher lapsed blithely into his Carterite habit of squeezing Israel, and Israel only. His model of Israeli-Palestinian peace seems to be that Israel gives and the Palestinian Authority takes. In this clumsy attempt at pressure, Christopher follows—he never really leads—the Egyptian government, which has been threatening to cancel a Middle East economic summit scheduled for Cairo unless Israel behaves. But this is no threat at all. Sure there would be some marginal benefit to Israeli industry from establishing greater economic ties to its neighbors. But it is the Arab countries, in dire straits socially and with few internal means of economic take-off, that really need this summit. Egypt most of all. Here is an instructive fact: Finland—with 5 million people—exports industrial goods of greater total value than the 230 million Arabs in the Middle East and North Africa. So, if President Mubarak wants to cancel the get together, let him. It would not be the Arab states' first grand, self-destructive gesture, and, alas, it probably would not be the last.

APRIL FOOLS: In 1988, George Bush attacked Michael Dukakis's call for stepped-up enforcement of tax fraud as a plan to put an "army of IRS agents into everybody's kitchen." This year, Ross Perot and Bob Dole promise that their sweeping tax reform plans will abolish the IRS "as we know it." Hold on. Any system that taxes some people more than others (which even flat taxes do, since they tax at the same *rate*, not the same overall *amount*) provides an incentive for taxpayers to lie about their income. Somebody is going to have to make sure people admit how much they make. And, to do this, someone has to conduct the "KGB-style" audits that Dole decries. But, even by his own logic, Dole's IRS-bashing is nonsensical. He's pledging huge cuts in the agency's staff. Does this mean it will do less, freeing citizens from its tyrannical reach? Actually, no. Dole wants the hated agency, which Americans would be better off without, to do *more*. He wants to ease tax filing by having it calculate 40 million taxpayers' forms for them. "The IRS can do it," he stammered last month. "Do it for them. Send them a bill."

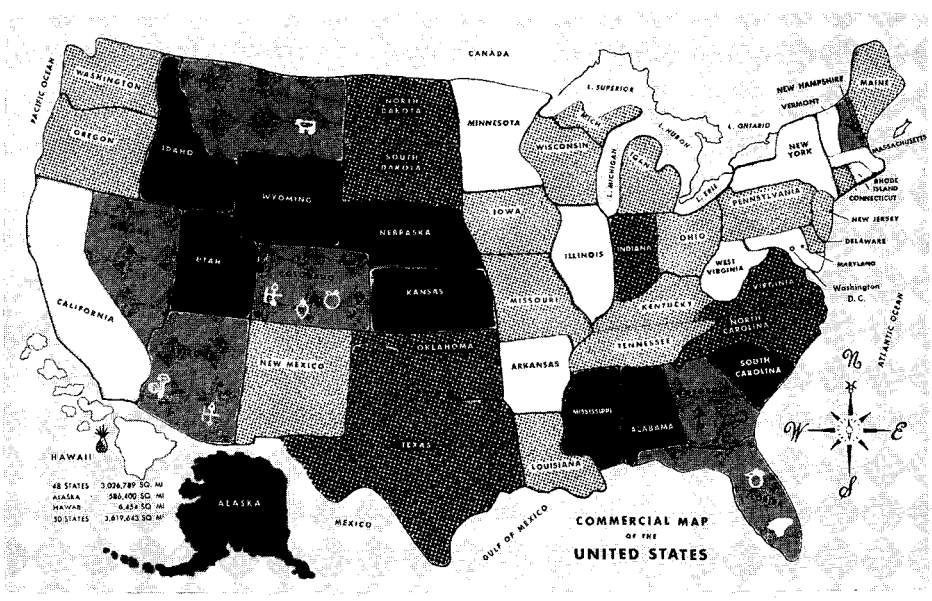
THE WINNERS, AT LAST: The judges of the Marie Syrkin Fellowship in Letters in Jerusalem—John Hollander, Ruth R. Wisse and Leon Wieseltier—are pleased to announce, after a rich and rigorous competition, that this year's winners are Norman Manea and Gary Rosenblatt. Manea is the author most recently of *The Black Envelope* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), and Rosenblatt is the editor and publisher of *The Jewish Week* in New York. The Syrkin Fellowship provides for a month's residence for a writer in Jerusalem at Mishkenot Shaananim, the restored nineteenth-century "tranquil dwellings" opposite the Old City walls, as well as transportation costs. The Fellowship is open to writers in all the forms, though the judges will honor Marie Syrkin's preference for *belles lettres* over academic research. The deadline for next year's applications is January 15, 1997. The winners will be announced in March. Applications should include a brief description of the use to which the applicant would put the award as well as samples of recent work. Applications and inquiries should be sent to Melanie Rehak/The Marie Syrkin Fellowship, care of this address. •

## Weekly Electoral Vote Estimate

As of 9/6/96
by Hal Bruno, ABC News Political Director

(538 Total Votes, 270 Required for Election)

Clinton=338 Even=65 Dole=135




Clinton Strong
Clinton Ahead
Close/Even
Dole Strong
Dole Ahead

*Weekly estimates are not scientific, but the result of a compilation of interviews and local polling.*

*Map modified for TNR by Jane Holloway*



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# ON EL RESCATE'S 15th ANNIVERSARY
# HELP US RESCUE ASYLUM

**Fifteen years ago, Salvadorans and North Americans united around the death of Santana Chirino Amaya, a 24 year old Salvadoran man. In August, 1981, Chirino's decapitated, tortured, and mutilated body was discovered near San Vicente, El Salvador, his thumbs and feet were bound with wire in the manner of right wing military death squads. Just a month earlier, Chirino had been deported from the United States where an INS official had summarily dismissed his request for asylum.**

Summary exclusion. Summary deportation. Summary execution. At El Rescate, we have worked for 15 years to make those words and concepts a thing of the past. The achievement of Temporary Protection Status (TPS), the institution of new asylum procedures through the American Baptist Church's lawsuit (ABC), the protection of rights to full translation and appeals have helped thousands of Salvadorans and Guatemalans to escape a summary fate. Now, after 15 years of struggle for the rights of human beings to life and liberty, all of these gains are in danger of being reversed.

The harsh provisions of new immigration laws will strip asylum seekers of due process rights and require them to plead for their lives in a matter of minutes while detained by the INS. No Hearing. No due process. No humanity.

Men and women, traumatized by rape and other tortures often need spiritual, psychological and legal support in order to speak the unspeakable. If these laws remain on the books, many more people like Santana Chirino Amaya will die, and we will return to a dark age of coersion and abuse by the INS.

What kind of nation will we be? Will we welcome those who seek life and freedom in asylum? Or will we return to a shameful past where racist quota laws and bureaucratic procedures, promulgated by anti-semitic State Department officials, denied entry to Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust? After genocide against Jews, Armenians, Gypsies, Cambodians, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Tutsi, Bosnians, and so many others...haven't we learned? Will the next genocide find us with laws so harsh that thousands will die because we refuse to respond?

A Salvadoran girl attends church in Los Angeles, 1996

Today, in El Salvador, the promise of peace rings hollow. The right wing death squads of the past have returned as the *Sombra Negra* (Black Shadow), implementing a fascist-inspired policy of "social cleansing" by assassinating the homeless, prostitutes, homosexuals, and other so called "disposable" people. The recent deaths of progressive political workers and union activists have renewed concern about the ultimate intensions of the extreme right.

We ask you to join with us to protect asylum as we know it. Don't let our lawmakers railroad asylum. Don't allow mass deportations of Salvadorans to become the cattle cars of the new holocaust in Central America. Write to your Senators and Congress people. Demand full due process protection for those seeking asylum. Who knows, maybe your relatives and friends will be next.

**El Rescate**
**Human Rights Here & Now**

Celia E. Grail
Executive Director

Robert J. Foss
Directing Attorney

Jaime Peñate
Centro Comunitario Centro Americano

**Be a part of El Rescate's Human Rights Here & Now Campaign!**
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NEW JERSEY POSTCARD

# Success 1996

*By David Samuels*

The cheering begins in nosebleed territory, in the steep rows of seats near the top of the Continental Arena, where suburban dads bring their kids to see the New Jersey Nets get blown off the court, and head-banging teens converge from the parking lots to raise their plastic lighters high in the air for White Zombie and Metallica. Nine thousand strong, the crowd is on its feet and screaming, cheers and whistles rolling in waves toward the stage where Mario Cuomo stands looking back into the dark. A fifty-foot screen projects the former New York governor's craggy face outward, and his black-rimmed glasses slip down his nose to give him the look of a general practice lawyer from the old neighborhood. Bridging the light of the stage to the darkness below is a giant sign that promises "Success 1996."

Cuomo plunges forward. "And they're going to give you a $550 billion tax cut. . . ." The applause starts again, sardonic and mocking. "And the public applauds. In the Reagan years they told you the same thing, and you wound up $4 trillion short." The salesmen and real-estate agents and would-be entrepreneurs who have filled the Continental Arena this August afternoon rise to their feet again, jeering and cursing. "Dole-Kemp! Dole-Kemp!" shouts a blond-haired young man, his shoulders too small for his wash-and-wear suit. "Now all you people who applauded, explain to me how you're going to get it," Cuomo says. "You can't get it from defense, because they're going to spend more on defense." "Go home," someone screams from the upper deck. "You lost! You're a loser!"

Peter Lowe's Success 1996, a motivational tent-show drawing tens of thousands to arenas across the country, is no place for losers. At $60 to $220 a head, it is a chance to participate in the rituals of America's most vibrant—and lucrative—secular religion. The evocation of an old-fashioned tent-show revival is not coincidental. Peter Lowe—an ebullient, red-headed ringer for Howdy Doody—is the son of Anglican missionaries and holds an M.A. in theology from Wheaton College. Lowe's chosen ministers in the church of success—including Ronald Reagan, Gerald Ford, Colin Powell, Norman Schwarzkopf, Tom Landry and Larry King—are ordained by a God who shows his grace through magazine covers and television cameras, and through the accumulation of personal wealth.

"In the first ten minutes I'm going to tell you four things that will change your life," promises Zig Ziglar, a spry 70 year old with the frenetic energy of a stand-up comedian. "Failure is an event. It is not a person," he says, informing the crowd that before he became a famous motivational speaker he drove a cab and weighed over 200 pounds. Studies by academic experts are mixed with anecdotes about prominent Americans born into unpromising circumstances. "His mother is a part-time waitress," Ziglar claims, of Harvard University President Neil Rudenstein. "His father is a prison guard." Ziglar is the author of a dazzling range of books and tapes, from *Secrets of Closing the Sale* to *Christian Motivation for Daily Living* to *Courtship After Marriage.* Armed with motivational books and tapes and inspired by stories of the successful and famous, the audience is ready to go out and make it on their own.

Having come to the Meadowlands for a dose of optimism and success, the audience is hardly in the mood to hear the former governor moan and groan about falling wages, ballooning deficits and the sacrifice it will take to bring America back. "[W]e're Americans," Cuomo says, of the GOP tax cut. "We're pragmatic and we're tough, and we don't like being conned." But the evidence from the New Jersey gathering points to a different conclusion, and Cuomo knows it. "We're not hearing that," he adds. "We love being conned. We love it." To see Mario Cuomo speak hard political truth to the optimists in the Continental Arena—originally named for former New Jersey Governor Brendan Byrne and now a monument to privatization—is to understand why the Democrats will remain the minority party for many years to come.

As the man once hailed as the Democratic incarnation of St. Thomas Aquinas is booed and mocked by the gleeful crowd, it is hard not to feel sorry for him and for the politics he championed for so many years in so many prime-time speeches and interviews. To watch Cuomo, a private citizen, looking helplessly out into the crowd beneath the giant banner promising success is to feel the shabbiness of the hotel ballroom the morning after the candidate has lost his last election. Why is Mario Cuomo here? There is the speaker's fee—tens of thousands of dollars for a half-hour speech—and there's the lure of the crowd of 9,000 people, the cheers and the applause rushing to the brain, to activate whatever powerful combination of hormones it is that keeps politicians going after the lights go out and the reporters stop calling and all that; left is a law office in Manhattan with a phone that never rings often enough.

"I've been at it for twenty years," Cuomo says, talking to himself as much as to the 200 men and women picking over their plates of chicken salad at the luncheon after his speech. "And the cruelest irony of all is that in my old neighborhood, South Jamaica, the schools now are not as good as they were when I was there. The streets are not as safe. . . . That's a terribly frustrating thing to realize when you're coming to the end of your life, that you have not been able to make your commu-



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nity better." No wonder the governor is haunted by ghosts. "I didn't speak the language," he remembers, thinking back to his childhood. "I didn't understand the culture." And then, standing in the echoing hallway of the Continental Arena, Mario Cuomo spreads his arms wide and sings:

"There's a school called Number Fifty....
It stands for the things that are the best
And the boys and girls who are entering
are entering to win
And they work with a vim and a zest.
They work with a vim—and a zest."

The audience applauds—for real—and Cuomo smiles at the memory of a time when the son of immigrants could get a good education in the public schools and dream of something better than what his father had, and could live to see his dreams come true.

"See," Cuomo says. "I know the damn school song." That he remembers the words to his old school song after all these years is touching and also a little bit sad. Mario Cuomo heard the crowd again last month in Chicago at a closely scripted convention at which the ghosts of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society were banished into the historical mists. Absent the promise of activist government that made his rhetoric soar in 1984, Cuomo's speech fell flat, and the New York Democrats who once worshiped and feared him made fun of the governor to reporters from *New York* magazine. After three terms in Albany, a shot at the Supreme Court and those two long-ago primary seasons when the chartered jets sat waiting on the tarmac to carry the governor to Nashua, New Hampshire, the old school song is barely a memory now. It is all that Mario Cuomo and his party have left.

DAVID SAMUELS is a contributing editor at *Harper's*.

**The way to stop Saddam.**

# THE CASE FOR IRAN

*By Jacob Heilbrunn*

A bloodthirsty tyrant orders his troops to overrun an ethnic enclave while U.N. relief workers helplessly stand by. Western European governments avert their gaze. The U.S. frets about becoming mired in endless conflict; partition seems inevitable.

That was the scenario in Srebrenica last July. When it happened again in Iraq last week, the Clinton administration didn't repeat the mistake. After ignoring initial warning signs that Iraq was preparing a new offensive against the Kurds, the administration responded by launching cruise missile attacks and expanding the no-fly zone to the outskirts of Baghdad. Though Iraqi security forces stayed behind in Irbil, the U.S. did force Saddam to withdraw the bulk of his troops from the area.

So far, so good. Except for one detail. In depicting the U.S. as the victor, the Clintonites have ignored the fact that there has been no victory. Quite the contrary. The Kurdish imbroglio has sucked in a number of foreign powers, thereby transforming a local conflict into one with ramifications far beyond its own borders. The machinations of the Russians, Turks, Iranians, French and Germans have supplied the coup de grace to the wartime Gulf coalition. The result: a new shift in power constellations in the Persian Gulf and the collapse of American grand strategy toward the region.

A solution exists. The most significant development of the past few weeks has been the reemergence of Iran as the focal point of the Persian Gulf. America's intervention on behalf of an Iranian-backed Kurdish faction increases Tehran's regional influence, and the intrusion of Iran itself into Iraqi territory has complicated the relationship between the U.S. and Iran. The moment has now arrived for the U.S. to abandon its self-defeating and anachronistic policy of isolating the Islamist state. If the U.S. is serious about removing Saddam from power, it must move to restore a balance of power in the Gulf, which means restoring relations with Tehran.

In contrast to their approach to many other parts of the world, the Clintonites have a strategy in place to deal with the Gulf. That strategy is called "dual containment." "Dual containment," which was first unveiled in 1993 by Martin Indyk, the current ambassador to Israel, is the brainchild of National Security Adviser Anthony Lake. In March 1994, in a *Foreign Affairs* article, he elaborated on the concept. Given enough pressure on "backlash" states, wrote Lake, they might be "transform[ed] into constructive members of the international community."

Lake's strategy was to isolate Iran and Iraq by persuading Japan, Europe and Russia to deny them international capital and weapons. In Lake's words, "building up one to counter the other is ... rejected in favor of a policy of 'dual containment'.... There is no longer a need to depend on either Iraq or Iran to maintain a favorable balance and protect U.S. friends and interests in the gulf."

Unfortunately, it is the U.S., not Iran and Iraq, that has been left isolated. No other country supports cutting off trade with Iran. Germany is particularly adamant. It hopes, as my colleague Charles Lane recently pointed out in *Foreign Affairs*, to carry out a new form of Ostpolitik that will, through economic and diplomatic engagement, soften up Iran for reform. Siemens, Daimler-Benz and Krupp are among the firms helping to rebuild the Iranian economy, and Bonn has underwritten $10 billion in sales and invest-



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ment there. Russia has cultivated both Baghdad and Tehran, consistently opposing U.S. efforts to maintain the post-Gulf war sanctions against Iraq and investing in Saddam's oil fields, while selling substantial amounts of weaponry to Iran.

During the cold war, containment was possible not simply because Washington stared down Moscow, but because Germany and Japan dammed up Soviet expansionism. In the post-cold war era, neither Middle Eastern nor western European countries are even remotely interested in adopting such a stance toward Iran. If this is containment, the container looks like a sieve.

In its zeal to create a new Middle East, the Clinton administration has sought to evade basic realities about balance of power between states. The only real option is to return to a strategy that pits Iran and Iraq against each other. Reagan and Bush's policy of supporting Iraq against Iran ultimately failed not because the idea was unsound, but because it took on a life and logic of its own. Today, dealing with Iran need not be tantamount to allying with it. There are other ways to balance Iraq; the administration should organize the Gulf Cooperation Council countries—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman—into a cohesive security unit. Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah has already noted that "it has become clear to Gulf Arab states that they are facing a joint security question because they are targeted by some lurking enemies." A joint military force might help ease those fears.

Obviously, the Iranian mullahs' capacity for mischief abroad is beyond doubt. Any détente between Iran and the U.S. would have to address Iranian aid to Hezbollah, the Rushdie sentence and Tehran's assassination attempts abroad. But there has been movement in the upper echelons of the Iranian leadership. The revolutionary fervor that animated the society is now a spent force, and that has allowed different currents and factions to bloom.

Domestically, Iran boasts a private sector and a lively press; its population enjoys more freedoms than any of its Arab neighbors. Politically, three main political camps can be distinguished: radicals who oppose all contact with the West; conservatives who espouse a normalization of relations together with rigid cultural mores; and a third pragmatist group composed of technocrats and merchants and led by President Hashemi Rafsanjani. America's refusal to open lines of communication probably does not fuel the ardor of the hardliners; but it may weaken the pragmatists, whose attempt to lure investment by the U.S. oil firm Conoco in the spring of 1994 was rebuffed by Washington.

It is difficult to understand why. For one thing, the U.S. should be encouraging companies to penetrate Iran if only so that the CIA, which traditionally uses business as a cover, can begin to infiltrate the country. As it stands, the CIA has a woefully weak base from which to operate inside Iran. This lack of information makes it harder for the U.S. to judge whether, and how, Iran really is changing and to begin to curry favor with its next group of leaders. When change comes in Iran, and it may come quickly, the United States should be ready to restore its old influence. After all, with its cast oil reserves and population of 70 million expected to exceed 160 million by 2020, Iran will long be the dominant state in the Gulf. The demise of the Shah in 1979 was America's greatest foreign policy defeat after Vietnam; and Washington has once again permitted anguish over a defeat to gum up current policy.

For a start, the U.S. should recognize and exploit Iran's general debility. Still exhausted from its war with Iraq, Iran has been unable to restore its armed forces; its military budget is one of the lowest in the region. Its economy remains in shambles. There is scant evidence that Iran has been able to develop a nuclear bomb, and Iran has declared that it will adhere to International Atomic Energy Agency inspection requirements.

Iran hawks such as Kenneth Timmerman, who has called for moving from containment to "rollback," dismiss any accommodation with Iran as a pipedream. For now, however, any rolling back should be done in Iraq, which presents a far more fundamental threat to American interests than Iranian fundamentalism. The more territory the Iraq-backed Kurdish Democratic Party seizes, the faster the U.S. will have to aid the Iranian-supported Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Iran is no more a rogue state than Syria or China, with whom the U.S. maintains relations despite their anti-American fulgurations. Washington must at least attempt to strike a modus vivendi with Tehran. Containing Iran as well as Iraq has not proved to be a viable policy. In attempting to contain both, the U.S. has contained neither. If Saddam is to go, the Iranians must come back. •

**Roger Morris and the eternal scandal.**

# PATH FROM POWER

*By Matthew Dallek*

One day in early 1970, National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger pulled aside NSC staffers Roger Morris and Anthony Lake. President Nixon had given Kissinger the green light to meet with senior North Vietnamese officials to negotiate an end to the war. Would Morris and Lake, Kissinger asked, help him prepare for the talks? The dovish Morris jumped at the chance. Peace, he thought, was at hand.

By April, Kissinger's secret talks had collapsed. Nixon had begun drinking heavily, watching screenings of the



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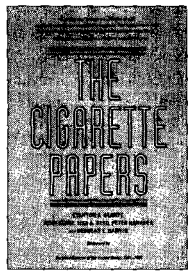


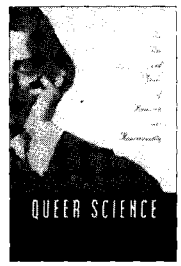


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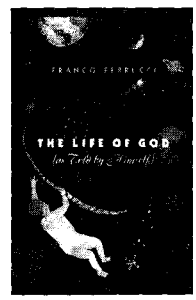


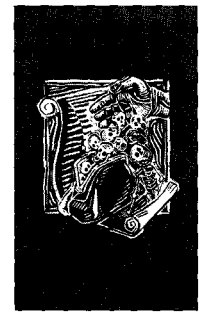

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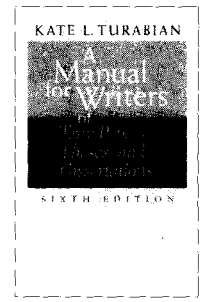


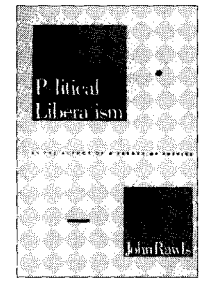


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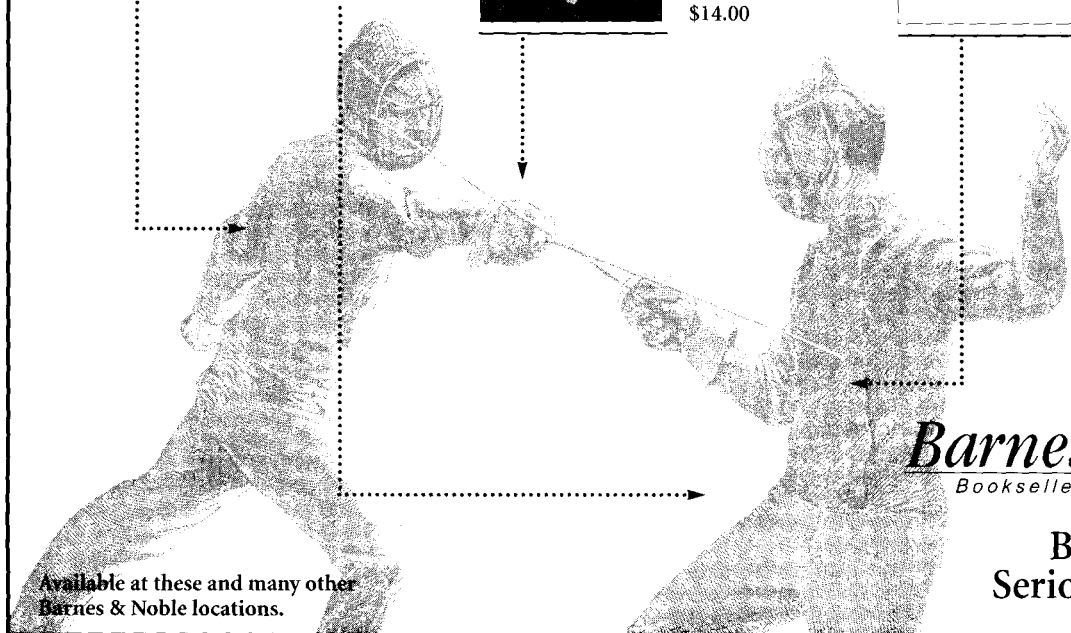

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movie *Patton* and talking of invading Cambodia. Morris smoldered. A U.S. invasion, he thought, would wreck the chance for a peace deal, suck Cambodia into a wider war and spark another wave of domestic protests. "The first goddamned American trooper across that border and I'm out of here!" he screamed at Lake.

On April 28, two days before Nixon announced the U.S. attack on Cambodia, Morris and Lake decided to resign. They had two choices: hold a press conference to denounce Nixon's Vietnam policy, expose his drinking and reveal he had been wiretapping government officials; or quietly submit a letter of resignation to Kissinger. Wanting to spare Kissinger, whom they still admired, they chose the latter course.

Today, Lake says he would do the same thing again, "because ... you could have more influence that way." Lake is President Clinton's National Security Adviser. But the failure to speak out still haunts Morris. He sees it, he wrote in 1994, as "the biggest failure of my life." He could have followed his conscience and spared the world "the blundering that lay ahead." But he acquiesced to the ways of the insider. Today Morris is a best-selling author who writes about the corruption eating away at the American political system, most recently during the Clinton administration.

Reading Morris's recent articles and books is like watching one of those late-night TV horror flicks. In the opening scenes the characters seem decent enough. But as you move through the story you realize that some monstrous evil lurks in the background laying waste to everything in its path. Morris's editorials speak of long, dark corridors of power in which elected officials do the bidding of sleazy lobbyists. There are shadow capitals, like Las Vegas, where the most powerful politicians flock to pay homage to wealthy corporate moguls. Venal bureaucracies scour for new raison d'êtres. CIA agents curry favor with unsavory rogues and criminals. And craven presidents succumb to "colonies of vested interests."

The villains vary, but the theme—national institutions are corrupt—is constant. "The United States," Morris wrote in a 1992 editorial, "remains a last bastion of corporate socialism, preserving our own new class of BMW Bolsheviks" and "resembl[ing] more and more czarist Russia." The muck, he argues, runs especially thick in the nation's capital: "Washington is paying lip service to change, yet mired in spent missions.... A stagnant Foreign Service was crudely politicized in the Reagan-Bush years. Exposed by recent hearings, the CIA stands derelict in insight and integrity. For senior officialdom, Republicans draw on stock-option bureaucrats revolving between public office and consulting for the highest bidder, and the Democrats form a similarly dubious if dogged regime-in-waiting."

Morris's latest book, *Partners in Power*, about the Clintons, is based on over 100 interviews with anonymous sources. With more than 200,000 copies in print, it was on *The New York Times* best sellers list for nine weeks. It is a study in moral squalor. In the first 100 pages we learn that the young president-to-be is a nascent scandal. As a Rhodes scholar at Oxford he has a voracious appetite for women, calibrates his opposition to the Vietnam War so it doesn't jeopardize his political career, manipulates powerful military officials to evade the draft, even spies for the CIA on fellow antiwar protesters. He is a man bereft of principle, bubbling with ambition. All this by age 23.

When Clinton arrives in Arkansas, things go from bad to worse. Presiding over a "world," the dust jacket tells us, "where corrupting money and favors flow freely and the tyranny of wealthy interests and their captive politicians mock democracy," Clinton is not your ordinary incompetent governor: he snorts cocaine, lies routinely, takes bribes, womanizes with reckless abandon, allows smugglers to fly weapons to the Contras in Nicaragua and quashes investigations of drug-runners friendly to his administration.

For Roger Morris politics was not always so evil. It once seemed downright exhilarating. The son of staunch Midwest Republicans, Morris grew up in a small suburb of Kansas City playing baseball, attending church and listening to his grandmother's homespun tales about Harry Truman and the corrupt Pendergast machine. He followed a well-worn path, earning a Ph.D. in government from Harvard. Shortly after graduation, he was inducted into the Foreign Service and began a remarkable ascent up the foreign policy ladder, starting out as a junior aide in the State Department and ending up as one of Henry Kissinger's top advisers. To move up that fast Morris had to play politics. He passed information covertly to friends in rival departments and ingratiated himself with powerful superiors.

One weekend in the spring of 1969, Morris, who had been assigned to cover Kissinger's office while his boss was in New York, received a sealed envelope from J. Edgar Hoover. Morris opened the envelope to find a detailed account of Martin Luther King's sex life. Around the same time Morris began editing Kissinger's diary, a "gold mine of bureaucratic duplicity and maneuver," he recalls. Like a slow-moving virus, the incidents ate away at Morris's conscience, grating on his strict sense of right and wrong. The brash young Methodist from the Midwest was now watching up close one of the most corrupt, devious presidential administrations of the century. The shock, in fact, was so severe, the disgust so thorough, that Morris, after a brief stint in the early 1970s as an aide to Senator Walter Mondale, packed his bags, hopped in his Volvo and, dream in tatters, moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Morris was not ready to abandon public life altogether; he still wanted to make a difference. Appalled by what he had seen in Washington, Morris believed that the most responsible thing for him to do was to tell the world what he had learned. So he decided to write. In the mid-1970s Morris concluded that most journalists covering American foreign policy missed a number of darker, hidden truths. The coups. The deals with



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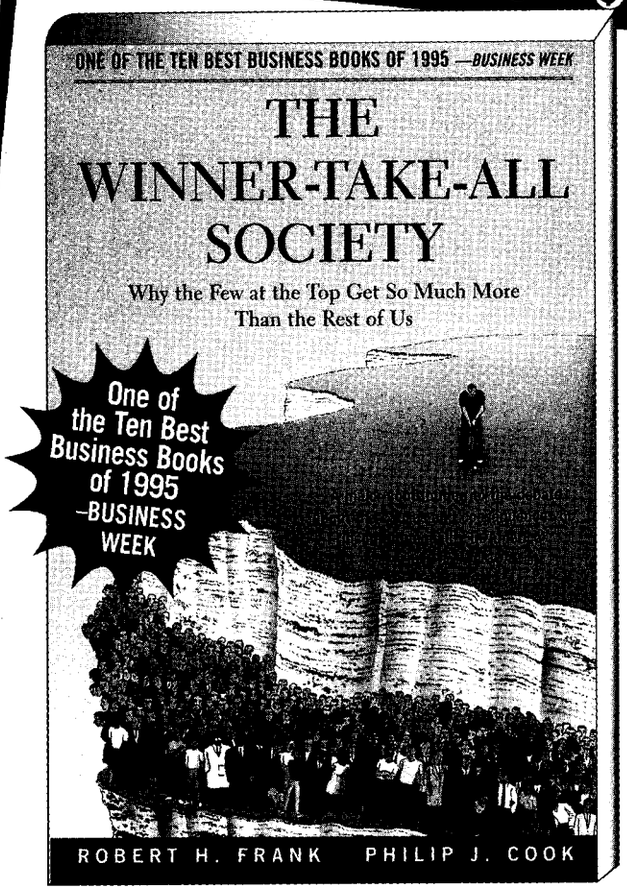
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right-wing dictators. Washington's inability to cope with new international dangers. U.S. military screw-ups. Congressional abdications and obfuscations. His writings, which in the mid- to late '70s included regular contributions to this magazine and acidic biographies of former colleagues Al Haig and Henry Kissinger, harped on these "enduring realities of American foreign policy." His articles had titles like "Pathology of a Blunder" and "Banality of Power." They were critical, tough and above all animated by a kind of left-wing animus for the political system.

Then, in 1990, Morris published *Richard Milhous Nixon*, a 1,000-page tour de force on Nixon's early life and career. The first of a planned three volumes (a second one is in the works), the biography marked a triumph of scholarship and analysis—the most detailed reconstruction of Nixon's early life ever published. In the course of his research Morris pored over manuscript collections from thirty-five archives and hundreds of oral histories and produced a critical—yet measured—portrait of the flaws and warts of perhaps the most important American politician of the last half-century.

The Nixon biography, though, is something of an exception to Morris's other work. By relying on manuscript papers, oral histories and other credible sources, avoiding the salacious scandals that tarnish his latest book on the Clintons, and choosing a subject who, after all, was one of the most devious politicians of the century, Morris was able to construct a thoughtful biography and an incisive analysis of U.S. politics. Morris did not have to use shady sources and suspect stories to make his point that American politics is rotten: Nixon made it for him. But Morris's animus toward "the system" takes him only so far, leading him in his exposé of the Clintons—built largely, it seems, on troopers who hate the president and right-wingers out to discredit the administration—into a kind of fantasy world of fixers and favors.

Thus it is perhaps no surprise that, in 1991, just one year after his greatest literary triumph, the more cynical, conspiratorial side of Morris appeared with the publication of Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin's *Silent Coup*. The book's authors argue that a cabal of national security officers deep within the foreign policy bureaucracy orchestrated Nixon's downfall. The reason? The president was too dovish! The theory has almost no support from serious scholars of the period; it is the kind of book that Oliver Stone could make into a full-length feature film. Roger Morris wrote the foreword.

It is his sense of failure and need for redemption that dominate—and distort—so much of Morris's work. His articles and books seethe with a cynicism that has become as American as baseball and apple pie—and almost as dangerous to public life as scandals and corrupt back-room deals.

MATTHEW DALLEK, a Richard Hofstadter Fellow in American history at Columbia University, is a Visiting Scholar at U.C. Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies.

**An answer to the inequality crisis.**

# WAGE WAR

*By Matthew Miller*

When it comes to wages, we're plagued by two "gaps" this year: the one between the well-off and the working poor, and the even bigger one between rhetoric and reality on the stump. Listen closely to the campaign and you'll hear sighs of resignation. Bob Dole peddles his 15 percent tax cut as the answer, but it's really an admission of defeat: nothing can get incomes rising, he's implicitly saying, so the best we can do is let you keep more of what you earn. That might sound alright, except that, for working stiffs, it's a bait and switch—Dole's plan saves its biggest breaks for CEOs, and pays for them partly by trimming the earned income tax credit (EITC) that helps the janitors who sweep their floors.

President Clinton and the Democrats, meanwhile, talk the right talk on skills and education, pledging to equip more Americans with the know-how they need to thrive in today's economy. But, since they're terrified of trimming the entitlement programs that dominate the budget, Democrats can't put our money where their mouth is. The result? Clinton's latest laundry list of job training, education and welfare-to-work schemes barely comes to $5 billion a year. That's less than one half of 1 percent of federal spending, or roughly what we'll hand out in windfall Social Security and mortgage interest benefits this year to millionaires alone.

With both parties building a bridge to nowhere on wages, it's time we asked if there's a better way. Start by



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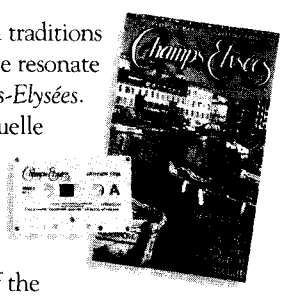


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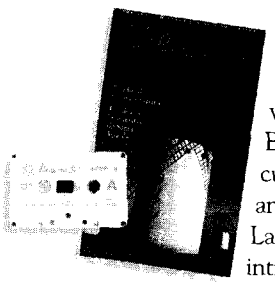

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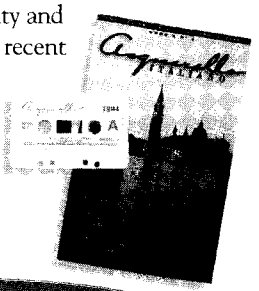

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getting clear on the problem. Though economists wrangle over data and definitions, and partisans bend them to serve various agendas, two things are certain. First, average incomes have barely grown over the last twenty years, after having doubled over the previous generation. Next, within this overall slowdown, those at the bottom are getting hammered. The poorest 5 percent of Americans, for example, saw their incomes fall 34 percent between 1969 and 1993, while the wealthiest 5 percent's soared 43 percent. Though some argue that upward mobility means this distributional snapshot is misleading (struggling dropout Bill Gates, for example, was poor one year and owned us all a decade later), anyone who's walked through our cities knows the bottom is losing ground. Twelve million Americans dwell in poverty despite living in homes headed by a full-time worker, up 50 percent since 1975.

Why is this happening? On overall wage stagnation, the villain is slower productivity growth, but that simply begs the question: Why has productivity growth slowed? On inequality, however, there's not even this pat explanation. A number of causes come together to tell the story of why so many Americans are stuck on the down escalator. Chief among them, say most economists, has been the way that technologies reshaping the nature of work reward people with more skills. What does that really mean? As Charles Schultze of the Brookings Institution explains, until thirty years ago, technology tended to boost efficiency through the division of labor—think of Ford's assembly line. Such innovations simplified the production process via standard steps (and rote jobs), rather than stressing the special skills of each worker. Over time, however, in the mysterious chicken-and-egg fashion of markets, consumers have gravitated toward more tailored products and services, while new technologies have made it cost-effective to market them. Thus we've moved, for example, from three television networks to dozens, from a handful of magazines like *Saturday Review* to hundreds with titles like *Fish Care*.

As technology aids the trend toward customizing while automating routine tasks and jobs, workers need, and get rewarded for, higher skills. Bank branch employees in the ATM era won't cut it unless they can help pitch mutual funds. With executives typing their own letters and voicemail ubiquitous, "secretaries" have given way to assistants who handle spreadsheets.

Such trends help explain why the average college-educated man now earns nearly 50 percent more per hour than his counterpart with a high-school degree, an "education premium" three times greater than a generation ago. Or why, even with an enlarged supply of more educated Americans, their relative earnings are still rising. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate for male high-school dropouts has gone from 5 percent in the early 1970s to more than 12 percent today. "Having lousy skills and the market twisting against you is the big problem," says Harvard labor economist Larry Katz.

But the wage gap pervading the new economy isn't simply a "skilled" vs. "unskilled" labor story. The fact is that inequality is also on the rise *within* almost any narrow group of similarly educated people. Television and CD technologies, for example, let the Lenos and Pavarottis capture the cash that once sustained a thousand Catskill comics and hometown baritones. Rainmaker lawyers and dentists in demand find they can make a killing on their own rather than subsidize their deadwood partners. At every level, says MIT's Paul Krugman, "it's as if an 'inequality ray' has been turned on the economy."

Economists say the "skill-bias" of technological change explains perhaps half of the growth in inequality. Trade may account for another 20 percent of the problem, less than the headlines and turnout at Buchanan rallies would suggest. But its effects are concentrated in certain industries. Immigration also inspires decibels that drown out the facts. Immigrants accounted for one-fifth of the growth of our labor force in the last decade, about half the share experienced back in the great migration at the turn of the century. No big deal, right? Tell that to less skilled Californians, where half the workers without high-school degrees are now immigrants. Some are here legally, others waived in under the amnesty offered in the late 1980s. Since 1965, when the previous skill-based immigration regime was scrapped in favor of today's family reunification system, immigrants have become much less skilled, says Harvard's George Borjas. The bottom line? While the influx of unskilled labor may not be driving inequality at the national level, experts say trade and immigration may together explain a third of the wage declines faced by high-school dropouts.

Then there's the collapse of private-sector unions, which also bolstered pay and benefits for millions of non-union workers whose bosses matched union rates to deter their workers from organizing. Rising payroll taxes these last fifteen years, which get passed on to employees via lower wages, haven't helped. Nor has the declining value of the minimum wage, which even after this latest increase is still below its level in the late 1970s. And everything interrelates. Threatened by low-cost foreign competition, for example, industries introduce labor-saving technologies, which cuts union membership and power, while the remaining jobs go to better-skilled workers.

What to do? Here's the usual list of remedies. Improve education and job training. Reform our labor laws, which scandalously let employers fire unionizing workers with impunity. Adopt the immigration reforms urged by the late Barbara Jordan, which would modestly lower legal immigration while shifting the mix toward better-skilled workers who don't threaten our working poor. Index the value of the minimum wage to inflation. And, while we're dictating, throw in universal health care, without which today's low-wage work looks worse than welfare.

The trouble is that these measures could take years, even decades, to make a dent; or they address too small a portion of a broad problem to be sufficient. If we



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# Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

# Blaming Unions

Robert Dole did not reveal his vision for education in his acceptance speech at the Republican Convention, but he did find time to lash out at teacher unions and blame them for the failure of American education: "If education were a war, you [the teacher unions] would be losing it. If it were a business, you would be driving it into bankruptcy. If it were a patient, it would be dying." Unions were right up there, in Dole's speech, with notorious public enemies like Saddam Hussein, "Libyan terrorists," "voracious criminals," and the U.S.'s old adversary, the Soviet Union.

Teacher unions are an easy target for political rhetoric.

In making his accusations, Dole was careful to separate teachers from their unions: "I say this not to teachers, but to their unions." But who started teacher unions? Who pays the dues that keep them going? Who elects the officers and determines union policies? Teachers do not have to join the union—although in some districts non-members must pay a fee because they benefit from the contract as much as members do. And if a majority of teachers did not support the union in their school district, they could vote it out and choose or form another union—or decide they did not want a union at all. Individual teachers may not always agree with what their unions do, but separating the two is like separating a church from the members who support it with their money.

Unions developed because teachers thought they needed them. Before unions, teachers were paid far less than other educated workers. Unions helped raise the pay scale to a decent level, though it is still far lower than the scales of other professionals like doctors or architects or accountants. Before unions, teachers were often compelled to punch a time clock and bring a written excuse from a doctor if they were sick. They were routinely ordered to give up lunch periods to monitor the cafeteria or the toilets. If a teacher disagreed with a principal at a faculty conference, the teacher could be sure he would be loaded up with additional unpleasant duties. Before unions, teachers could not take part in politics on their own time, and in most places they couldn't even have a beer in a pub. If individual teachers sometimes differ with their elected union representatives about policies or actions, you would nevertheless have a hard time convincing them that an attack on their union was not an attack on them and on the fundamental rights that, through the union, they have won.

Another version of the Dole argument that attempts to dissociate teachers from their unions goes like this: *Teachers* would like to make changes, but their unions prevent them. There is no question that teachers and unions sometimes oppose change, and no wonder. All too often in education, changes are pushed through without any evidence that they will work—or would be useful if they did. Teachers have seen so many "innovative" or even "revolutionary" programs come and go, it should be no surprise that a large number are cynical about the likelihood of real improvement.

Unions sometimes also resist change—and for the same reasons—but contrary to what Dole says, they lead it, too. A report issued by the RAND corporation several years ago found that the more established a union is, the more likely it is to take the lead in introducing positive change. Cincinnati and Toledo, with their peer review programs, which provide mentoring for new teachers and assistance for tenured teachers whose teaching is not up to par, are good examples. The unions pioneered and developed these plans, and union leadership was able to bring along the teachers, who as I've indicated, are skeptical of change for very good reasons.

Teacher unions are an easy target for political rhetoric like Dole's, but the evidence just isn't there. In 1994 and again this year, a number of D.C. schools could not open on time because of serious fire code violations. Was that the fault of the teacher union? Is the union responsible for the fact that millions of dollars from the D.C. school food program have disappeared without a trace? Is it the fault of the union that school districts across the country were unprepared for the surge in enrollment that hit the schools in September and are now forced to hold classes in hallways and closets?

In the 1970s, when American automobiles were losing out to foreign imports (made by union workers), and especially to the Japanese, can you imagine a Bob Dole acceptance speech that blamed the plight of the automobile industry on the union? People would have laughed and asked, "Does the union design the cars? Does it run the plants? Does it hire and fire the workers?"

It would be foolish to say that teacher unions do not make mistakes. But it is even more foolish for Bob Dole to lay the blame for everything wrong with our schools at the unions' feet. There are far more eligible candidates.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1996 by Albert Shanker.

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could do one thing tomorrow, what would it be?

Reasonable people (and even conservative Republicans, in private) can agree that the unfettered market has put us on the road to Rio. There's no overwhelming reason to honor market wage-setting regardless of the social consequences. CEOs don't—they pack their board's compensation committees with pals who conveniently bid up each other's pay. Why shouldn't we say there's nothing "right" about full-time work that produces poverty, any more than it's "right" that we should let cancer run its course without intervention?

The answer is to subsidize low-wage employment on a massive scale. In a forthcoming book, Edmund Phelps of Columbia University offers a scheme that would guarantee $7 to $8 an hour for full-time work via a sliding-scale tax credit to employers. Dick Armey should love it, because workers could be hired at a cost to firms of just $4 an hour, with government putting up $3 to match it. Since the social benefits of work (in terms of less crime, welfare dependency, etc.) exceed less skilled workers' productivity (which limits what employers can offer in wages), it makes sense for society to subsidize the difference. The idea is to get less advantaged workers into entry-level jobs, while helping work pay decently. Since the subsidy would be available to all firms based on their wage scales, there's no fear of stigmatizing a small pool of disadvantaged job seekers.

The cost? Phelps reckons $120 billion yearly. That's 1.5 percent of GDP, roughly the same as Bob Dole's tax cut. Phelps thinks it could pay for itself, given the cuts in welfare, police and courts that would come as work became the norm. But let's play it safe, and pay for it with the $30 billion that goes to today's EITC, topped off with a Swiss-style wealth tax so tiny it wouldn't be worth calling the lawyers to avoid it (and which exempted three fourths of us anyway). How's that for rough justice? Poor workers hammered by forces beyond their control are helped thanks to a lifestyle-unaffecting levy on a handful whose wealth has been lifted by that same whirlwind. If we can't sell this reasoning to plutocrats who'd have to pay, self-interest should do the trick: taking the edge off inequality may be the only way to stave off popular revolt against the free trade and immigration that benefits top earners most.

Cranks will say such income transfers are a nonstarter. In a year when both parties agree only on throwing poor kids off the dole, they've got a point. But things aren't hopeless. After all, our biggest government program, Social Security, involves a massive redistribution of wealth that's nearly wiped out elderly poverty. Packaging counts. Social Security relies, brilliantly, on FDR's illusion of insurance. History may well hail the pols who creatively packaged the "wage insurance" that got us through today's technology wave. What's the alternative? If a country as rich as ours can't find two cents on the dollar to stop the inequality explosion undermining our politics and our quality of life, all the prisons and private patrol cars in the world may not save us. •

**Showdown on the Dole plane.**

# THE AIR WAR

## *By Roger Simon*

"I was dicked around by the Dole campaign, and I mean *dicked*," Ellen Warren, a tough, experienced reporter turned columnist for *The Chicago Tribune*, was saying. "I was reduced to a new level of groveling."

Warren is not alone. Many of the journalists who cover Bob Dole feel angry, sad, humiliated, frustrated—dicked. "Are they incompetent or do they hate us?" asked Ceci Connolly of *The St. Petersburg Times*. "A little of both. All of the above."

The Dole staff seems equally delighted. Nelson Warfield, Dole's press secretary, says: "I think my impression of the press corps we are traveling with is that they are, in many cases, with notable exceptions, less experienced in covering campaigns than I really expected." Adds John Buckley, the campaign's communications director: "I think that there is a little bit of *whining* that has taken place with some news organizations ... that is a phenomenon I have not dealt with previously."

How bad has it gotten? So bad that, when one reporter was asked if her anger toward the Dole staff is affecting her reporting, she did not issue the obligatory denial. "I'd like to think it isn't," Jill Zuckman of *The Boston Globe* told me, "but it's hard to know. I'd like to think I'm not taking it out on the candidate, but it's

ROGER SIMON is a nationally syndicated columnist whose book on the 1996 presidential campaign will be published by HarperCollins next year.



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hard to know. I don't know if I would write a different story if I were feeling well-treated."

It began with the phone calls. Or lack thereof. A reporter who cannot get calls returned has two choices: leave the business or become an editor. Yet, in the early days of the Dole campaign, calls made to Nelson Warfield often were not returned for days, or forever. Even the major papers were getting stiffed. "In terms of returning phone calls, they were abysmal," says a reporter for one of the most prestigious papers in America. "It was a complete nightmare."

What made the problem worse is that just about all the major papers in the country wanted and expected interview time with Bob Dole for their candidate profiles, just as if his were a normal campaign for president. But getting to sit down with Dole turned out to be a very tough ticket. "It was late '95, and I was writing the *Tribune*'s major profile on Dole," Ellen Warren says. "After weeks of phone calls, I was desperate for an interview, but I was not getting anywhere. So I flew to Washington, and I sat in the lobby of their damn offices and I said, 'Look, *The Chicago Tribune* is one of the few papers in the universe who endorsed a Republican for president in 1992. Illinois is a place you guys need bad. All those electoral votes? This is win-win for you guys.' "

The Dole campaign was not impressed. So, on New Year's Eve, Warren flew to New Hampshire, rented a car and drove to Concord, where Dole was shaking hands before moving on to Portsmouth. "I went up to Warfield and I said, 'Nelson, look at me. I'm here. I don't have warts. Put me in his car to Portsmouth. I can get forty-five minutes with Dole, and it will be perfect,' " Warren says. Warfield's reply: "We'd like to help you, but we can't."

Warren believes that "their policy was clearly to not allow access. Period. The end." Warfield denies it. "My recollection is that we were in a bunch of profile pieces," he says. "The major dailies had opportunities at him. But not every newspaper got the opportunity to sit down with him. He was running for president, running the Senate and being a U.S. senator. There were limits on the amount of time he had to spend covering all those bases." Ellen Warren admits that Dole did grant some interviews. "He did speak to Kit Seelye of *The New York Times* briefly in his office for *her* profile," Warren says. "I was fried."

Which raises the second problem: while most campaigns give *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* favored treatment, critics say the Dole campaign makes a religion of it. Witness the battle of the plane.

Shortly before the Republican convention, the press entourage covering Dole grew large enough to justify a second plane. In past presidential campaigns, reporters who had been covering the candidate on a regular basis were assigned to the candidate's airplane, and newcomers, short-hitters, foreign press, etc. were assigned to the B plane. But the Dole campaign introduced a caste system, one that favored some big papers and, critics charge, one with a conservative editorial page. *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today* and *The Washington Times* were each offered the chance to purchase permanent seats on the candidate's plane, while all other newspapers were exiled to the B plane, quickly dubbed *Elba*.

Why did this matter? Because Dole, and all the important staff, fly on the candidate's plane. That's where news might be committed. That's where Warfield, and on rare occasions Dole, wanders back and talks to the press. Reporters on the B plane could go days or weeks without seeing any more of the Republican nominee than would an avid viewer of C-SPAN. And access to Dole and real news is the primary concern of the Dole press corps. Though Warfield says Dole averages one interview per trip (usually for twenty minutes) in the front of the plane with reporters from publications large and small (I have gotten two such interviews), in one respect Dole is far less accessible than the president of the United States. Since declaring his candidacy, Dole has had just two news conferences, or three if you count the six questions he took from four reporters at the National Association of Black Journalists convention in August. Bill Clinton, by comparison, has stood at a lectern and taken questions and follow-ups from reporters seventeen times since January 1. So being on Dole's plane where a pearl or two might actually fall from his lips is no small matter to a press corps that feels starved for access.

Four bureau chiefs from exiled publications sent a stinging letter of complaint to the Dole campaign. "This is totally without precedent in any presidential campaign or at the White House," the letter said. "Never has a tiny group of newspapers been given such huge competitive advantage over other newspapers." "It was elitism," says Ben Roth of *The Houston Chronicle*. "The Dole campaign institutionalized a common Washington practice and threw it in our face." It was worse, Ceci Connolly says. "One of the reporters with a permanent seat was able to get a friendly chat with Jack Kemp on a day that I was not able to get within 100 yards of Jack Kemp," she says. "The Dole campaign was making it hard for me to do my job."

In response to the letter, the Dole campaign jury-rigged a solution: five more news organizations would rotate into two seats on the candidate's plane every day. All the other newspapers in America that wished to travel with Dole could rotate into three.

When asked who selected the papers that would get permanent seats, Warfield's usually sharp memory grew cloudy. "It evolved," he finally said. (Buckley, on the other hand, pointed out no fewer than three times that he had nothing whatsoever to do with the decision.) Both men promise further reforms, if need be, but say that the Dole press staff is not the only target of press distrust. "Grumbling here is not limited to how one group of reporters feels how this campaign treats it," Warfield says. "There's a significant amount of grumbling about how the reporters are treating each other."

This is true. But it is a problem, the grumblers say,



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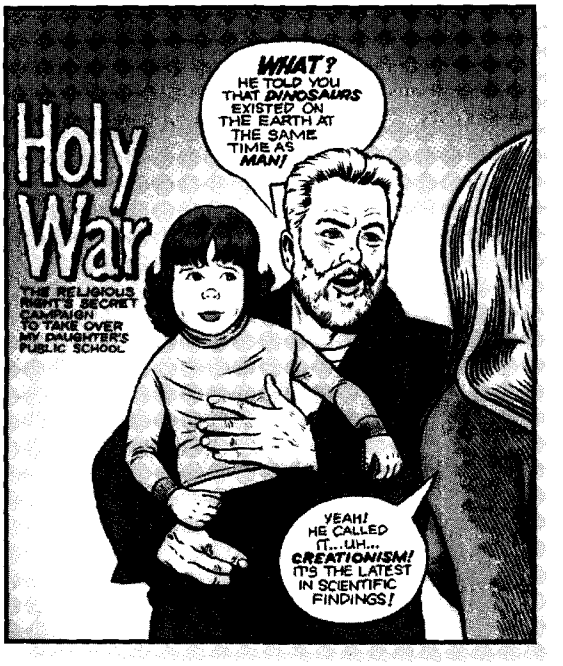
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created by the Dole staff's caste system. "I feel angry at them," says the *Globe*'s Zuckman, referring to the reporters from the six newspapers with most-favored-nation status. "They've been co-opted. They are afraid to say anything because they are afraid to lose their seats."

Buckley and Warfield say the Dole press operation is much improved these days, that more resources have been allocated to the "care and feeding" of the press and that calls get returned. "If we don't return every phone call we are doing something wrong," Warfield says. But, while reporters say that Buckley usually returns his calls, other staffers remain far less conscientious. And Zuckman keeps an actual file labeled "Indignities" that she fills with incidents ranging from "when campaign officials ream you out" to the day reporters were directed to use port-o-potties standing in a field when indoor plumbing was available.

But the Dole campaign's real problem isn't that journalists don't feel comfortable or loved. In fact, while there is obvious friction with the staff, most reporters have a fondness for Dole himself ranging from outright admiration to the affection one might feel for a slightly doddering uncle. The problems aren't emotional, they are functional: reporters feel they can't get enough of the information they need to write their stories.

"When I did a gender gap story in June, I called Christina Martin [the deputy press secretary] regularly for three weeks to find out what the Dole campaign was planning to do to appeal to women voters," says Jodi Enda, a reporter for Knight-Ridder. "In that time, she faxed me a one-paragraph statement and a list of Republican women who were supporting Bob Dole. I printed the statement in full because I had nothing else to use from the Dole campaign, and I interviewed a number of the women. But, when I called the Clinton campaign, they made five senior staff people immediately available to me who were directly involved in the gender issue."

The irony is that it's Dole, not Clinton, who should be worrying about how his campaign is communicating with women. Dole, after all, trails among women by as much as twenty-five points. If Dole's staff won't break a sweat to help with Jodi Enda's story, when will they?

"I've got news for them," Enda says. "Voters aren't getting their message. By treating the press badly the Dole campaign is depriving voters of important information they should have before they cast their ballots. It's not about whether I get a seat on the candidate's plane or the use of a nice bathroom. It's about whether readers get enough information about the man who wants to lead them into the next century."

Tension between politicians and the press is not only usual, it's appropriate. It's a delicate balance that serves the public. On the Dole campaign, however, that balance has been replaced by a teeter-totter of ill will.

"Have you ever seen a happy reporter?" John Buckley asks. "There are not many of them."

Not in the Dole press corps anyway. •

**CAMPAIGN JOURNAL**

# COMMON GROUND

## *By Michael Lewis*

*August 29:*

I had been investigating what turned out to be a false rumor that the city of Chicago had renovated only the sides of the Henry Horner housing project visible from the United Center. On my way back from the ghetto, in the desolate no-man's land created by a phalanx of police officers between the Democratic convention and the poor, I bump into Senator John McCain. The shock of finding a Republican outside the Democratic convention is followed by a disturbingly pleasant sensation. I'm beginning to understand the war that must occur inside a 14-year-old boy who discovers he is more sexually attracted to boys than to girls. The longer I hang around McCain the harder it is to fight the feeling that just maybe I'm ... Republican.

McCain has become so involved with the Dole campaign that he might as well be the candidate. His assignment for the next few days is to travel south from Chicago through Missouri and Kentucky, keeping one day ahead of the Clinton bus tour. The idea, as I understand him, is to poison the local media against the president, which sounds like fun. Tonight he's been stirring up trouble at the TV stations covering the convention; now he is headed out to a rich Chicago suburb for a big fund-raiser. Suddenly I face a choice: to go with McCain, or to stay behind and watch Al Gore's acceptance speech. No sane person would stay behind.

After forty-five minutes on the road we find ourselves in an enormous house in a rich neighborhood. About 100 prosperous people mingle with drinks in their



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hands beneath Impressionist paintings discussing just about everything except what has brought them together. The only people who look slightly out of place are the Illinois Republican candidate for Senate, Al Salvi, in his middle-class polyester suit, and his wife. The slight tension is dispelled, however, when Salvi's wife accidentally knocks over a crystal lamp. "Hope you have liability insurance," someone shouts, and the crowd breaks out in knowing laughter: everyone understands liability insurance. Everyone has property to lose.

The exact words spoken are not nearly so interesting as the tone of the event, which is of a private club gathered to discuss its affairs. At length, Salvi introduces McCain, who performs what is essentially a stand-up comedy routine written for an audience of people who make more than half a million dollars a year. "I want to thank Rich for hosting this event in his modest middle-income tract home," he begins. "The difference between us and President Clinton is that President Clinton believes that everyone should own a home. Rich and I believe that everyone should own a home like this." It turns out that McCain has done a lot of these events, and in his experience the folks are interested not in what Al Salvi has to offer America but in being humored. The host knows this, too. He goads McCain to give the crowd what it's after: "Tell them how Dole asked you to nominate him," he says. Politics—as opposed to McCain's celebrity—becomes immediately superfluous. "The good news is that Al Salvi has enough money to win this race," McCain concludes, gamely. "The bad news is that some of that money is still in your pockets."

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM PRESTON FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

And then he stops, without making the case why giving money to Al Salvi will matter to anyone. The reason is that it won't. In the lives of even big benefactors, politics occupies a ridiculously small place; campaign contributions are akin to paying the electric bills. A year or so ago I sat across a desk from hedge fund manager Michael Steinhart and watched him squeeze some major decision about Democratic Leadership Council funding between a huge trade in the stock market and a problem with one of the animals in his private zoo. The DLC—what Jesse Jackson calls "Democrats for the Leisure Class"—would hardly exist if it weren't for Michael Steinhart. But to Steinhart is was just another of his many hobbies. It interested him, of course, but not nearly as much as his zoo. Thus people who take their power for granted share something with people who have no power: in neither is there any strong impulse to activism. The rich, like the poor, lead lives filled with foregone conclusions.

Later that night I receive a message from Barbara Feinman, formerly Hillary Clinton's ghostwriter and now the ghost of Morry Taylor's political manifesto. The last I'd seen Morry was on the second day in San Diego when, out of a mixture of tedium and disgust, he alone of the Republican primary candidates had declined Dole's invitation to join him in his private box. He'd gone to Vegas instead. You can see where Morry's disdain for politicians comes from. Like other rich people, his only contact with them is when they call to ask him for money or favors: when Morry looks at a politician he sees a useless beggar. Dole wants money; Phil Gramm wants him to locate a new plant in Texas. Morry felt that if he hung around much longer he'd be stuck paying for Lamar Alexander's next campaign.

Barbara sounds shaken up. She's just returned from three days with Morry. It turns out the tire king rented a pair of trained grizzly bears—a 600-pound female and a 1,000-pound male—to deploy in commercials for Titan Wheel. He dragged Barbara to the filming. During the event, as Morry went to kick a field goal over the outstretched paws of the female grizzly, the bear was stung by a horsefly. In a flash the grizzly forgot she was tame: she rose up eight feet in the air and roared so loudly that Barbara, fifty yards away, sprinted off the field. Morry, to his credit, didn't flinch.

To add insult to insult Morry seems to be growing tired of his manifesto, and of politics. The Grizz is returning to the wild. "You couldn't have any more questions about politics," he growled at Barbara's tape recorder at the end of three days. "I answered all the questions that exist." Barbara racked her brain for some issue of public policy that she had failed to address and that Morry would need to if he ever were to become president. "What about flag burning?" she asked.



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"Where are you on flag burning?" "If a guy wants to burn the flag," said Morry, "he can burn the flag." He pulled on his cigar, thoughtfully. "But here's the thing: if you burn the flag then anyone who wants to do whatever they want to you can do it—there's no punishment for that."

*September 7 & 8:*

Las Vegas is where celebrities come to die. In the Las Vegas airport you are coaxed down the moving walkway by Connie Stevens and Frankie Valli; on the strip downtown you are drawn to the casinos by billboards featuring Rich Little and Wayne Newton. Better than any other place in America, Las Vegas knows how to squeeze the last few drops of credibility from people, like one of those machines that combs tailings of abandoned Colorado silver mines for tiny fragments left behind by the original miners. And so, at first glance, it would seem appropriate that Las Vegas is where I have come to find Jesse Jackson.

I seek out Jackson for the same reason I seek out John McCain or Morry Taylor. There is a sense about him that there isn't about any of the principals currently running around trying to get themselves elected. He's fighting the intense pressure to be something other than who he is or say something other than what he thinks. Political passion seems always to arise out of the inchoate need to resist some force larger than oneself. That is why it is so conspicuously absent inside the two major parties. At the Democratic convention Jackson was the only speaker who shut down the TelePrompTers and just *talked.*

Jackson is in Vegas to see the Tyson fight and incidentally to hand a House seat back to the Democrats. Over the next couple of months he'll travel to every district that has a close race and exhort the black and poor to the polls. In some cases, he'll make the difference. Today, for instance, he's speaking to churches in West Las Vegas, where the Republican incumbent, John Ensign, won in 1994 by 1,470 votes. In a three-block strip are nine black churches inside of which are enough votes that went uncast two years ago to throw the House seat to the Democrats. And today is Sunday.

Several hundred people have crammed into the Greater New Jerusalem Church, but none of them seem to know where Jackson is—not the pastor, not the TV crews, not the Democratic candidate for Congress who was stood up an hour ago at Jackson's hotel. Half an hour after he was meant to speak, Jackson pulls up in a Cadillac. It turns out he's been visiting with Mike Tyson, whom he baptized eight years ago and now considers a good friend. It's just the first sign of the harmonic convergence of dangerous black people that is occurring today in Las Vegas.

Jesse Jackson's church performance is pretty much always the same, but, like a Buchanan stump speech, it has the force of being delivered for the first time. The reverend doesn't so much stand at the pulpit as dance back and forth on the balls of his feet, like a prize fighter. The most curious aspect of his delivery is how much *less* formal it is than his private speaking voice, which goes some way to explaining why he doesn't always translate to white audiences. I can understand him perfectly when he talks to me; when he addresses a crowd I find him incomprehensible. Even his accent plunges down the social register: "joy" becomes "jie," "hungry" becomes "'ongry." Maybe he senses that at some level he's more likely to reach his poor black audience if he reaches *only* his poor black audience. The first part of the speech is a nostalgic call to arms in which he asserts that black Americans face the same struggle they always have. ("Las Vegas, Mississippi. Ain't nuthin' changed but the heat.") But even here this sounds like a stretch, and it fails to arouse the crowd as much as the second part of his speech. The second part is a plea for economic justice, and the room heats up as he delivers it:

> They say poor folk are lazy. [MURMURS OF RECOGNITION.] Who works the hardest and the longest? Every day? ["TELL IT PREACHER!"] Who raises other people's children? Who changes the beds? Who vacuums the floor? Who wipes the toilets? Who cleans the slopjohns? ["IT'S THE TRUTH JESSE!"] Furthermore. Furthermore. Most poor folk are not on welfare. Most poor folk work every day. They work every day. Still can't send their children to college. Most poor folk are not black. [LOUD CHEERS.] They are white. And they are female. And two-thirds are children. And whether white, black or brown, *of* the earth. And it is our moral obligation to feed all of them whether black or white or brown. [CRAZED APPLAUSE.] Misery is not black or white, it's wrong or right. [STANDING OVATION.]

Watching the roof explode off the top of the church at the end of each performance you can see that something important has happened since the primaries. An awful lot of things that less fortunate people want to hear are no longer being said by any candidate in a major party. Commencement of the full-scale war between the two parties has shut down a lot of little messy debates. The Jacksons and the Buchanans have been folded into their respective tents. You can see that Jackson is struggling against the circular logic that excludes his group from a democracy: because their concerns are not explicitly addressed, the poor don't vote; because they don't vote, their concerns are even less likely to be explicitly addressed. How this resolves itself God only knows.

From the third and final sermon we head off to the local trauma center, where the rap artist Tupac Shakur lies in critical condition with three bullets in his chest. Rap music, oddly enough, has become the nearest thing to a political voice of the poor. Tupac says he discovered his music and its themes "when I was out there with nowhere to stay, no money," and that theme runs right through his lyrics, along with an impressive indifference to mainstream politics. When not long ago Shakur was asked in an MTV interview if "anything Bob Dole says about rap music means anything to you?" his reply was far more acute that Dole's attack on him. "I don't have no disrespect towards Bob Dole," he said. "I know he don't know what he's talking about. He's just talking. Some card that somebody gave him and he's just reading off that card. But he's cute. He's my grandfather." Tupac was actually trying to say something nice about



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Dole, which makes what he did say all the more withering. ("They speak the language of the other half," says Jackson from the front seat of our car. "They speak the language of the hopeless. They are in the valley of dried bones—of recycled pain.")

It is the second time in two years that someone has tried to kill Tupac, and the second time that no one saw a thing, even though Tupac travels with bodyguards. We arrive at the trauma center to find it more or less empty: a handful of indigent kids, a couple of policemen, a young white woman who introduces herself as Tupac's personal assistant, and a businesslike representative of Death Row Records, the company that posted $1.4 million in bail to spring Shakur from jail last October. The phone in the hospital waiting room rings: it's one of the three men who plausibly can claim to be Tupac's father. He's calling from jail.

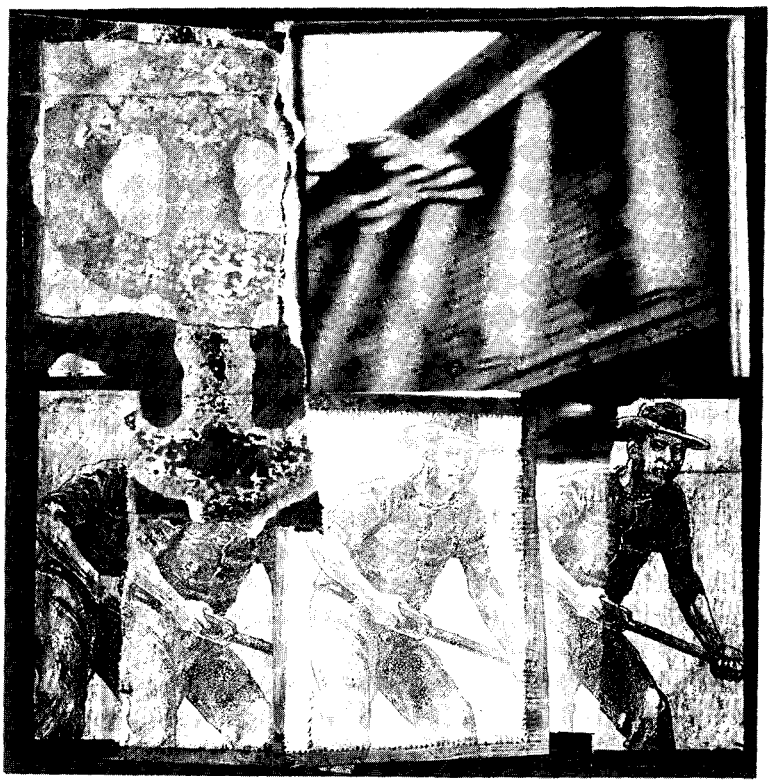

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM PRESTON FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Not long after Jackson is promised entry to the hospital room, four men from the Nation of Islam arrive. They look sinister, though it takes me a moment to figure out why: it's this business of making uniforms out of clothing that isn't designed to be worn uniformly. They wear well-pressed dark suits, shiny black shoes and clip-on bow ties. They all have the same haircut—close-cropped with a part cut into the side. They all wear the same cologne. They walk and stand in loose formation, with the most senior in the lead.

From there it's all a game of whispers: Jackson whispers to Death Row Records; Death Row Records whispers to Farrakhan's people; Farrakhan's people whisper to Jackson. There is some question about who gets to see Tupac first, which is strange since Tupac is in a coma, blissfully unaware of the struggle for his political value. There's no point in even trying to pretend I understand what is going on. But one thing is clear: everyone with ambition to speak for the black community wants a piece of Tupac Shakur. As poor young black men drift away from mainstream political activity and toward sheer alienation, a kind of displacement occurs that leaves official spokesmen like Jackson and even Farrakhan high and dry.

From the hospital we visit Don King at his home, completing in a single day a kind of hat trick of black culture. Once again, more whispers: while Jackson goes inside King's phony stone mansion I am left to wait for an hour in the car gazing up at the dozens of ersatz golden light fixtures and then down at the limousine running lights at the base of the steps. I seek consolation in the thought that the world would not be quite right if Don King had good taste. When the reverend finally emerges, Don King is with him in baggy brown shorts and a sloppy joe shirt. His hair is flattened down on his head, belying his oft-repeated story that it has stood straight up ever since he met God. Like Tupac Shakur, he wears not one but two gold watches, one on each wrist. An absurd display of wealth, on the one hand; on the other a funny parody of mainstream success culture: If you are going to turn your wristwatch into a status symbol, why have only one?

It isn't until we arrive at the airport that I have a moment alone with Jesse Jackson. I want to ask him how it feels to strike the sort of compromise he has had to strike this year. (Clinton's genius has been his ability to push the left to within one inch of its breaking point without pushing it over.) After Clinton sandbagged him in 1992 with a speech to the Rainbow Coalition about rap lyrics Jackson told his biographer, Marshall Frady: "I can maybe work with him, but I know now who he is, what he is. There's *nuthin'* he won't do. He's immune to shame. Move past all the nice posturing and get really down there in him, you find absolutely nothing ... nothing but an appetite."

He's looking at me with superhuman indifference as I produce the book from my bag and flip to this passage. We've spent much of the past hour racing through the airport a step ahead of the hounds. His plane is just about finished boarding, and I have time for this one question. But just then a pair of airline employees interrupt with a demand for more autographs. Jackson takes way too long to supply them, and I can tell what's going to happen next. He's going to hand back their pens, turn to me and say, "gotto go." Then he'll vanish down the jetway. Which he does.

*September 10:*

The poor people in my Manhattan neighborhood



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long ago discovered workfare: those who remain on welfare supplement their stipends by collecting tin cans and glass bottles and returning them to the receptacle at the Key Foods on the corner, which pays them a nickel a throw. The freelance recycling business has become the leading street industry in New York, and for all I know the rest of the country: all over the city you now find people—most of whom are homeless—pushing shopping carts overflowing with cans and bottles. Around the hub of maybe sixty receptacles on the sides of Manhattan supermarkets swirl thousands of poor people who have discovered the free market.

At any given moment on my little corner you can find several dozen men and women of all ages and all races lined up to deposit their hauls a can at a time. But the line is clearly subordinate to the secondary market in cans and bottles that forms twenty yards down the block. The center of all action here is a slim young black man who for the past few months I've studiously avoided. He's always standing amid ridiculously tall piles of giant clear garbage bags filled with cans and bottles; by midnight the sidewalk is completely blocked; occasionally the police show up and move him. It never occurred to me that he might find me more dangerous than I found him. But when I walk across the street to introduce myself he, together with two of his customers, jumps up in terror. The two others sprint down the street and vanish around the corner. The black man packs up his things as fast as he can.

"You with the IRS, man?" he asks, frantically.

I explain I'm not and hand over my NEW REPUBLIC business card, which he holds at a distance as if it might bite him on the nose. At first he's pretty sure that I am either an undercover cop or a tax collector; then he caves and believes my story. "This is NYC," he says, when I ask what on earth he's doing with what looks to be about 5,000 cans and bottles. "You gotta survive by any means. *This* is by any means."

The Key Foods does not really seek the recycling business, it turns out. Its machines dispense only about $200 a day, or enough to compensate the street people for only 4,000 cans and bottles. The gap between supply and demand is filled by Rob—the black man's name—who sits at the center of a small economy of poor people premised on recycling. He buys the precious discarded cans and bottles for half what Key Foods pays, sorts them into piles—Coke with Coke, Pepsi with Pepsi, Bud with Bud, and so on—and sells them to a Russian in a pickup truck for a nickel each.

The dizzying string of middlemen in the recycling business calls to mind the brokerage industry; each can seems to pass through four different hands on its way to reuse. Indeed, a few hours with Rob and you can see how finely attuned to market logic homeless people have to be. Rob commutes forty-five minutes from a small apartment in Harlem and works the streets twelve to fourteen hours. On a good day he can earn $200, which implies, at a spread of two and a half cents a can, that he trades 8,000 cans a day. He supplements his recycling income with a side business in the amazing assortment of goods that homeless people find on the street: today his cart holds a walkman, two pillows, a desk chair and some empty cigar boxes. He also conducts a brisk trade in Pepsi points, the stickers on the side of Pepsi bottles that can be redeemed for various products. An elderly Vietnamese woman offers Rob a couple of stickers for which he is willing to pay 2 cents a point (she refuses) since Pepsi points are useful only in bulk. The price goes up the larger the quantity for sale. "My brother got 2,000 points," he says. "He's holding on for someone who'll pay five cents a point."

Rob buys sacks of cans and bottles off homeless people as he explains the ins and outs of the trade. He treats his customers—most of whom, he says, have drug problems—politely and honestly. "I'm looking out for the poor people," he says, "because I represent the poor and unknown." His customers reward him by refusing to deal with anyone who tries to steal his turf. If another middleman seeks to move into the Key Foods collection area on, say, a day that Rob is sick, the homeless people who collect the cans on the street will simply live with their cans until Rob returns. "But then you got guys trying to steal each other's cans when they sleeping," says Rob. "Man, you know things is bad when you got people trying to steal *cans* from each other."

Rob's view of the government is curiously similar to Steve Forbes's: most of what the government does, he feels, just gets in people's way. The IRS is forever disrupting the can recycling trade, for instance. He was on welfare for a bit but got off because the time it took to collect his check wasn't worth it. He now views the welfare office chiefly as a good place to collect discarded cans and bottles. Rob finds the minimum wage laughably low—how could he ever feed his 4-year-old son on 5 bucks an hour? "People coming by and saying, man, 'he's a bum, he homeless,' " he says. "Man, I'm not homeless. I *was* homeless. But if they come into my little place they be shocked at what I got. Fifteen boxes of records. 'Damn! He got all that shit.' My mixer alone cost $400."

Even worse than the IRS is the government's continuous threat to interfere with his true love, music. "Truthfully," says Rob, "I don't want to work for no man. I am deeply into hip-hop. I want to have my own production company. Rap is my heart and soul and where I come from. They tryin' to stop it but it's real." He waves his hand over the heads of three elderly Korean ladies busy counting out cans on the sidewalk. "It's *here*." Rap music is Rob's main political issue. Right now he favors Clinton only because "he ain't so much like Bob Dole and them trying to stop my rap music." If his support is not deep it is because he feels Clinton is no longer for the poor. "Ain't no one for the poor any more," he says. "I just signed up independent. I'm going to vote for the person who's gonna be for *my* people." •



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# THE HARD QUESTIONS

## Sense and sensibility

Not by nature a dyspeptic person, I found my mental equipoise profoundly "challenged" (as we say these days) by the recent media extravaganzas thrown by our two great parties. What did we see? Babies on parade. Human ailment and affliction thrown down as trump cards in political advocacy. Surely the suffering of others makes claims on us. But what are the limits of these claims in politics? Can we not argue in behalf of a policy or program without a warm dunk in the treacle pot?

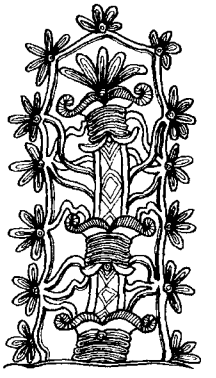
One entry into this question lies in the distinction we appear to be losing between compassion and pity, between solidarity and sentimentality. There is a famous passage in Rousseau's *Second Discourse* in which Jean-Jacques pictures an infant being torn to pieces by wild beasts. The raw cry of nature dictates an immediate outcry of horror and distress. But a philosopher, Rousseau claims, can watch such a scene unmoved. His retreat into abstractions quashes his ability to respond unreflectively. This, according to Rousseau, shows the essential corruption of civilized man, who has lost the emotion we must all strive to regain: pity.

But the West's great religious traditions contradict Rousseau, suggesting that undifferentiated, unmediated emotion cannot sustain an ethical commitment to others. In the Christian tradition, for example, the believer is called to witness; to help make visible the unjustified suffering of others. There is something sinful in seeing desperate need and walking away; in knowing one's neighbors are being hauled off to death camps or torture centers and turning one's back. But a theology, a whole structure of belief, is at work here. One isn't responding as an unreflective member of a species but as a person abiding by a particular moral framework. Continuing, not just momentary, claims are made on our time and attention. Our hearts may go out, but our heads must also be engaged. This is not pity but compassion.

The term pity derives from *pietas*, or piety. And in today's pop-therapeutic culture, we demonstrate piety with the throb in the throat and the uncritical embrace of the victim. Pity is about how deeply I can feel. And in order to feel this way, to experience the rush of my own pious reaction, I need victims the way an addict needs drugs.

Which brings us to Christopher Reeve at the Democratic convention. I join others in celebrating his spunkiness in the face of a terrible tragedy. But that doesn't mean I agree with him about the central role research into spinal injury should play in our funding priorities. If I want to argue against Reeve's political advocacy, it means I have kept my distance from him, and since pity, as opposed to compassion, collapses the boundaries between people, that makes me unfeeling.

In the world outside conventions, victims are often unattractive, even repellent. We didn't see flea-infested, stinking, foul-speech-spouting homeless men and women inside the halls in Chicago or San Diego. For them pity is inadequate, even counterproductive, since they may not evoke tender feelings. What they require is not sentimentality, but politics, relief animated by a moral calculus. That's where compassion comes in.



To see how far we've strayed, compare the contemporary pity regime to Lincoln's appeal during the Lincoln-Douglas debates for the moral equality of all human beings, slave and free. Lincoln knew that much of his audience didn't want slavery to spread but also remained wary of those men and women called slaves. It's not at all clear that a call to pity would have worked, since his white, Illinois audience feared the black slaves toiling in the South as much as they pitied them. Lincoln, therefore, cast his appeal not to pity but in behalf of justice. Slavery was a "monstrous injustice," incompatible with free institutions. Not an advocate of complete equality between the races, Lincoln nevertheless pushed the moral argument. He could find no logical reason why black Americans were "not entitled to all that the Declaration of Independence holds out." Thus, when Douglas defended popular sovereignty of the sort that permitted slavery's spread, Lincoln accused him of "blowing out the moral lights among us." Unlike Reeve's appearance at the United Center, which distorted policy discussion by turning a debate over science funding into a referendum on one's capacity to emote, Lincoln's argument was an invitation to debate—not just with defenders of "popular sovereignty," but with radical abolitionists as well—the consequences of extirpating a loathsome, but long established, institution.

This way of conducting politics is gone. Instead we are moving toward our own version of the republic of virtue—not virtue sustained by ethical formation in and through our basic institutions—but virtue as boundless pity: the United States of feeling good about ourselves. In order for sentimentalized virtue to reign we require victims. Where would we be without them? But we don't want these victims to be particular folks with concrete claims. The more generic the better. Hence the handiness of the pop-therapeutic genres that now prevail. They allow us to rapidly master the varieties of victimhood. We can even play the game ourselves if it comes to that. The dynamic requires wrapping ourselves in the mantle of goodness that we believe inheres in the unmediated claim of the victim. Real human beings, with their complex lives and emotions, are effaced. Thus, for political purposes, we show people at conventions who got AIDS through transfusions. But the far more common routes of transmission—through unprotected sex or dirty needles—remind us that victims are fallible, perhaps even reckless. They are not "innocent"—at least no more so than the rest of us. But what is happening to them is tragic nonetheless.

When the language of justice gives way to the language of pity, compassion is lost. Hannah Arendt captured this powerfully in her discussion of the differences between the French and American Revolutions. The French Revolutionary reign of pity was abstract and limitless, turning on an ideology of victimization rather than on response to the concrete claims of victims, and it ended in terror. Writes Arendt: "For compassion, to be stricken with the suffering of someone else as though it were contagious, and pity, to be sorry without being touched in the flesh, are not only not the same, they may not even be related." One feels compassion, or comprehends it, only if sufficient distance between people is maintained; only when human distinctiveness is preserved even as we recognize and respond to the claims of another. The boundless generic sentiments on display in San Diego and Chicago may help account for the vapid nature of so much of our political speech, speech in which civic idiom has given way to the onslaught of self-righteous feel-goodism. We are "blowing out the moral lights among us."

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**



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# BOOKS & The Arts

## *Stanley Kauffmann on Films*

### Revelations

Aristotle was wrong: plot is not more important than character. Of course he was talking about tragedy, but that's no excuse. His dictum has become more and more questionable, especially in this century. Aristotle is challenged once again, in a small but unabashed way, by Mike Leigh's new film **Secrets & Lies** (October).

Leigh, deliberately or not, is an apt challenger because character is his prime interest. He is noted in English theater and film for his extensive work with actors long before the acting begins, leading them into ways of thinking and living that will help them to plumb their roles. The result, in such films as *High Hopes* and *Life is Sweet*, is almost as if the actors came down and sat among us, so confident are they in their achieved new beings.

Leigh's last film, *Naked*, was a touch too mannered à la Godard to have his usual immediacy. But he's back in form with *Secrets & Lies*. The characters are pores-open vivid, so vivid that the gimmick of the plot and the feel-good ending don't distract much. (Take *that*, Mr. A.)

Hortense is a young black Londoner, an optometrist, practicing successfully and living intelligently. She was an adopted child, and her adoptive mother has just died. Hortense now wants to find her biological mother, and through a social agency she learns who it is. The agency advises her not to investigate further on her own, to let them handle it, but she disregards this caution and arranges to meet her mother, who, she has just learned, is white.

Cynthia, the mother, had given birth twenty-seven years ago when she was 15, doesn't even remember immediately having been with a black man, and had never seen the baby. The film proceeds through the effect that black Hortense has on Cynthia and on Cynthia's family—her other daughter, white and fully grown; Cynthia's brother and his wife: and the effect that this effect has on Hortense. Somewhat surprisingly, Hortense is accepted with relative ease. This is quite credible in the warm-hearted Cynthia and her equally warm-hearted brother, Maurice, who is a good man just to the edge of belief; but it's not exactly foreseeable in the others, including the white daughter's white boyfriend.

Still, if disbelief isn't quite suspended, it becomes secondary because of the acting. It's excellent, all the way. The social worker in the agency at the start is played by Lesley Manville with such a subtle note of well-practiced friendliness, such a careful blend of professionalism and boredom, that our appetites are whetted for more acting at that level. And we get it.

Marianne Jean-Baptiste plays Hortense and makes us glad of it every moment. She gives the young woman pride and reticence and unhistrionic appeal. Brenda Blethyn, as her mother, triumphs in a particular way: she has to do a great deal of crying for several reasons, but it's never false or tedious, and she manages considerable variety in it, reflecting the different causes for the tears.

Timothy Spall is Maurice, owner of a neighborhood photography studio, who is a congenital force for goodness. Phyllis Logan is his chronically short-tempered wife, whose moods are eventually explained. Actors who play rebarbative parts often get inadequate recognition; so let's note Logan's skill and understanding. Claire Rushbrook, as Hortense's white half-sister, is even more short-tempered. She works as a street-cleaner, instead of going to college, as a sort of revenge on the world, an adult version of a childish tantrum. Rushbrook, too, presents a realized person.

Leigh certainly helped all these people to their performances and, knowing how good they had become, knew how to rely on them. For instance, at the first meeting of Hortense and Cynthia, they have tea in a drab little shop, otherwise empty. Leigh never cuts during this scene: his camera remains fixed on the two women sitting side by side. Implicitly he says to them: "The film is yours for six minutes. Please fulfill it." Which they do.

In quite different tempo, Leigh has compassionate fun with a long series of poses by Maurice's customers in his studio: anniversaries, engagements, solo shots, family groups—a fine series of acute vignettes. Leigh is sensitive, too, to the element of distance, which of course means the space included in a shot. He knows when a long shot will serve the moment best, and, with his reliance on his people, he never needs to use an immense close-up.

Leigh, the writer, ties up things somewhat neatly and is a touch homiletic.

### FILMS WORTH SEEING

**American Buffalo.** *David Mamet's quasi-mythic play, about two men in a junk shop and a bungled robbery, still fascinates with its hyper-realism. Dustin Hoffman and Dennis Franz are at least good enough to make it all intense. (Reviewed 9/16 & 23/96)* **Celestial Clockwork.** *Sex, fun, opera, intrigue in the Paris that we all wish existed. Ask no questions and the fizz is great. (9/2/96)* **Manny & Lo.** *What is freedom today? Two sisters, 11 and 17, living on the road, try to find out in this delicate comedy. (8/19/96)* **A Time to Kill.** *The trial of a black man in Mississippi for murdering the white rapists of his young daughter. Strong acting and directing almost overcome the too-tidy handling of the theme. (9/2/96)*—**SK**



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Leigh, the director of cast and camera, is masterly.

In 1992 Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky made *Brother's Keeper*, a documentary about the trial of an elderly recluse in rural New York who was accused of murdering his co-recluse brother. What struck me most forcibly about this film was the sense of community it evoked, the sense that the defendant was being supported by neighbors in a way that's typical of country people.

Now Berlinger and Sinofsky have made a documentary called **Paradise Lost**, which was done for HBO and which they are distributing to theaters themselves. It's about the 1993 trial in rural Arkansas of three teenage boys for the brutal murders of three young boys. I don't understand the title, unless it's meant to indicate the schism in communal feeling caused by these crimes.

The Arkansas victims' bodies were atrociously mutilated, and the teenagers were accused of satanic cult practices. All three defendants were found guilty. Two got life sentences; one, considered the ringleader, was sentenced to death. All three have appealed their sentences, and their appeals are in legal process.

The film includes interviews with the parents of the victims and the accused, provides discussions with the police and the attorneys involved, is present at conferences (which I would have thought private) between clients and attorneys and among attorneys by themselves, and of course is in the courtrooms. More than one courtroom: for technical reasons, one of the accused was tried separately.

Most of the material is sobering, some of it merely bizarre, some of it ghastly. But the film leaves several big questions unanswered. What led the police to arrest the three defendants in the first place? We're told no more about this point than that satanism was suspected. Nor are we shown why two of the defendants were found guilty. The solo trial is much clearer because this youth gave the police a confession (assailed by his attorney); but no evidence is given us about the two others. Even if the film's point is that the evidence against the other two was scanty, it looks here like the film's omission, not the state's. And late in the narrative the stepfather of one victims gave the filmmakers a bloodied knife. They passed it on to officials. Why didn't he give it to officials in the first place? Why had he delayed in producing it? The film saith not.

*Paradise Lost* runs 150 minutes and would have benefited by fifteen or twenty minutes' condensation. Much of the local-color material is repetitious or distended; at one point the defendants are


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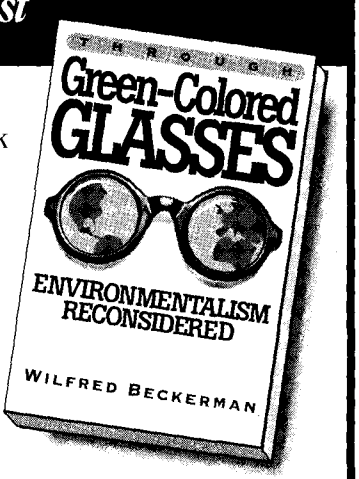


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shown getting into police cars in slo-mo, just to vary the repeats.

Berlinger and Sinofsky are not cheaply exploitative, but they do seem to suffer from contemporary documentary mystique. Of course they must have discarded much footage, but they still seem somewhat inebriated by the idea that, because something has been photographed, it is in some degree valuable. This figurative inebriation affected them so strongly that they seem never to have asked themselves why they were making this film. Was it to prove that the defendants were wrongly convicted? Was it to investigate the fabric of this Arkansas community and its tangle of suspicions and beliefs? Was it to indict the practice of Arkansas law on both sides of the case? It would be slickly evasive to say that all of these matters, or even others, are the answer. After we've seen *Paradise Lost* we don't know quite what it was supposed to have done to or for us. It's simply one more instance of the worship of fact on film. •

# *Real Absences*

**By James Wood**

## No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1995 by George Steiner

**(Yale University Press, 430 pp., $30)**

George Steiner's prose is a remarkable substance; it is the sweat of a statue that wishes to be a monument. Readers of his essays in *The New Yorker* will be familiar with that prose's laborious imprecisions and melodramas; the platoon-like massing of its adjectives, its cathedral hush around the great works. Nabokov once complained that one of Steiner's essays was "built on solid abstractions and opaque generalisations"; but things are worse than that, as his new book of essays demonstrates.

George Steiner has a fear of exhibiting even rhetorical ignorance, and this is accompanied by a superstitious worship of "greatness," where greatness has been detached from its referent and has become a portable magic, like feng shui. "An Uncommon Reader," in his new book, provides two amusing examples on successive pages. Steiner is discoursing on the decline of "classic codes of literacy." ("Do not even ask a relatively well-prepared student to respond to the title of 'Lycidas'.") Every true reader, he avers, "carries within him a nagging weight of omission:" the books that he has not read. Apparently there are books that even George Steiner has not read. And yet he knows that they are great: "the eight volumes, unread, of Sorel's great diplomatic history of Europe and the French Revolution haunt me." Or a page earlier: "I have, a dozen times, slunk by Sarpi's leviathan history of the Council of Trent (one of the pivotal works in the development of western religious-political argument).... I shall never manage the sixteen thousand pages of Amiel's (profoundly interesting) journal currently being published. There is so little time in 'the library that is the universe' (Borges's Mallarméen phrase)." David's lament for Jonathan, he tells us, is "unsurpassed in any poetry."

All this greatness is memorialized in rippling and indiscriminate lists, whose tic is a consumer's indefinite article. Just as one asks for a coffee, a piece of pie and a Coke, Steiner asks for "a Socrates, a Mozart, a Gauss or a Galileo who, in some degree, compensate for man"; or "a Mantegna, a Turner or a Cézanne ... a Racine, a Dostoevsky, a Kafka." He charges that "the pressure of presence throughout the world of the mind and of moral feeling exercised on civilization by a Marx, a Freud, even a Lévi-Strauss, is of a calibre which American culture does not produce." This is not a trivial habit of style. There is only "a coffee," but there is no such thing as "a Mozart." There is Mozart, singular and nontransferable, a concretion, not a vapor. Steiner's use of lists, and his use of the indefinite article, suggests that the meal of greatness can be had in any order and in any combination; the important thing is to fill oneself up and be bloatedly grateful.

It may be that Steiner, detecting his own vulgarity in these matters, compensates by wrapping great works in veils. Since greatness is a magic, one must be wary of offending it, in particular by unthinking worldliness. "If we choose, we can put on Opus 131 while eating breakfast," he quivers in his book *In Bluebeard's Castle*. This is not a good thing. Steiner is here denouncing the coarsening freedoms of modernity, specifically American modernity. One of his persistent sensations, doubtless accurate, is that reading as it was pursued a hundred years ago in bourgeois families has been superseded by listening to music. This technological proximity to great music is all very well, but one should not be too intimate with holiness. Steiner enunciates the dangers, in two languages: "There can be an unprecedented intimacy, but also a devaluation (*désacralisation*)."

Steiner's melodrama of transcendence accounts for his air of excited gravity. He approaches each work as if leading a coup to restore a monarch to the throne. First he must synchronize his beating heart with the reader's: "We are entering on large, difficult ground"; "Here extreme precision is needed"; "Let me be absolutely clear on this"; "Again, this is a most complex topic." Generally, the coup fails. The less precise his prose is, the more it speaks of the importance of precision. An emblematic moment occurs in his essay "Absolute Tragedy." Steiner urges on us the blackness of our times ("this century has witnessed a carnival of bestiality"), and suggests that pure tragedy's lack of mercy may be our most appropriate literary form. "If this perception can, must be dwelt on, if it must be 'thought' (in Heidegger's active sense of that word), do there not attach to it the potential, the likelihood of a renascence of tragic drama?" "Heidegger's active sense of that word": here is the essence of Steiner. The operatic flounce, the sentimental wrestle ("if this perception can, must be dwelt on"); the allusion, quite irrelevant, to Heidegger, followed by the ascription of the importance of thinking to the word itself rather than a demonstration of its activity. What is "active" here, except a pulse?

The prose is a servant of the thought, and the thought is ... a servant. Great work is to be worshiped and protected, and great work requires great questions. His commonest sentence is a question: "Is it possible that...." "Could it be that...." Could it be that anti-Semitism is the Gentile's guilty revenge on the impossible demands of Mosaic monotheism, Christianity and messianic socialism, all Jewish "inventions"? Could it be that great art thrives best in elitist structures, in totalitarian societies? Is it possible that great art does not merely co-exist with barbarism and evil, but in some way encourages it? These are some of the questions of Steiner's work. He seems to relish their unanswerability, as if that made



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them better questions, and as if the fact that nobody has ever answered them means that nobody has ever asked them. Steiner is in love with the glamour of the unsayable. He has sensations rather than arguments. In his essay "Real Presences," he notes that all value-judgments about works of art are unproveable and arbitrary. "*Anything can be said about anything*," he italicizes. Indeed. *And nothing can be said about nothing.* There are times, as Auden warned, when "to ask the hard question is simple."

Steiner's new book lets us see that his work since *Language and Silence* (1967) has been impressively repetitive. The first essay in his new collection, "An Uncommon Reader," from 1978, expands a sensation central to both *In Bluebeard's Castle* (1971) and *Real Presences* (1988). Steiner has felt, since the 1960s, that our age is "in retreat from the word." The word, for Steiner, signifies a certain authority of meaning and a body of assumed knowledge. This retreat is partly, and trivially, a matter of fashion. Education is no longer rooted in the Greek and Latin classics. We listen to music but we do not read aloud to one another. Culture is now democratically accessible. Most people own paperbacks, and few people have libraries of hardback volumes. In place of "*cortesia*" there is now "informality." Culture was once kept alive by stern schooling and by the cultivation of memory, especially through learning poetry by heart. (This was the education that Steiner received in the *lycée* system in Paris.) "Memory is, of course, the pivot," but in most students there has been an "atrophy of memory." Quite forgivably, Steiner's thought bears the characteristic impress of a university teacher who has not recovered from the shock that he received in the 1960s when the counterculture (a phrase Steiner spits, when he can) ambled into his *cortesia*, and who has refueled his shock at the pump of postmodernism, whose excesses seem to repeat philosophically what the 1960s attempted politically.

The retreat has deeper lineaments. Never mind the counterculture. Writers no longer write for the glory beyond death: "The very notion of *fama*, of literary glory achieved in defiance of and as rebuttal to death, embarrasses." This is, above all, a crisis of meaning. Modernism snapped the idea of a natural link between a word and its meaning, and Freudianism has undermined our sense of control over that meaning. Meanwhile the belief in God, which guarantees a telos, has fallen away. The greatest danger, as Steiner sees it, comes from the philosophical skepticism that travels under the name of deconstruction, postmodernism or post-structuralism. The modernists strove against the decay of meaning, but deconstruction embraces it, embraces the free play of meanings. The text is a bubble of signifiers constantly revealing its own contradictions and wistful ambitions, and the contemporary critic's only job seems to be to prick it. Where modernism was unafraid to make hierarchies, deconstruction erodes them and postmodernism ignores them. Truth is radically unstable. *Auctoritas* is gone.

There are too many professors of literature who see around them only collapsing vertebrae for Steiner's complaint to be other than conventional; and an argument on behalf of distinction—Steiner's argument—is surely cheapened by not itself having much distinction. In fairness, though, it should be noted that Steiner departs from these other complainers in three ways. He is philosophically more literate than most, competently dragging the heavy iron of the Germanic tradition into his corner whenever he can. And he is much more open to new work, in various languages, than is usual among English-language critics. There are people who speak happily of their years at Cambridge University in the '60s, when the young Steiner filled lecture rooms, burrowing into his cellular erudition and prompting students to


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discover writers who were hardly known to them: Borges, Barthes, Garcia Marquez, Beckett. An essay on translation in this volume shows Steiner passionate and not too imprecise, arguing the merits of the Austrian novelist Thomas Bernhard and pleading for his translation into English. In 1982, when this essay was written, only one of Bernhard's novels had traveled out of German. Now most of them are available in English, and Steiner had something to do with this.

But Steiner differs from other Jeremiahs most spectacularly in his response to the malaise. The solution is Steiner's doctrine of the Real Presence. He proffered this in his Cambridge lecture of 1985, "Real Presences," which he expanded into a book of the same title. He thinks that the solution is frankly theological. It is, alas, vaguely religious. His prose, always smeary, becomes diligently evasive in the course of this particular sensation. Deconstruction, for Steiner, is a nihilism, and "the summons of nihilism demand answer." The answer is faith. In the face of a deconstructionist who claims that *Madame Bovary* is just a set of signifiers, or Mahler's Fourth Symphony just complex notations on staves, Steiner demands that we read and listen "as if"—as if these great works have a transcendent meaning which is irreducible. This, suggests Steiner, is what Flaubert meant when, dying, he complained that "that whore Emma Bovary" would outlive him.

GEORGE STEINER BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

We will have to believe, Steiner teaches, that these and other great works "incarnate" a meaning in the same way that in the Christian communion the bread and wine incarnate the flesh and blood of Christ. (That is what the doctrine of the Real Presence refers to.) Meaning is guaranteed by a belief in the transcendent, in the divine. Speaking strictly, we cannot know that this is so, but just as Pascal made his wager, we must make ours: "Where we read truly, where the experience is to be that of meaning, we do so as if the text (the piece of music, the work of art) *incarnates* (the notion is grounded in the sacramental) *a real presence of significant being.* This real Presence, as in an icon, as in the enacted metaphor of the sacramental bread and wine, is finally irreducible to any other formal articulate. . . . " A little earlier, Steiner refers to Descartes's "*sine qua non* that God will not systematically confuse or falsify our perception and understanding of the world" and adds that "without some such fundamental presupposition" in regard to sense and value, we cannot understand great work. He calls this "our Cartesian-Kantian wager, our leap into sense. . . . " It is this theological underpinning that funds not only true reading, but also the art of translation and the blasphemy of nihilistic or "absolute" tragedy.

This is no more than the milk of optimism. Even a philosophical amateur knows that Kant and Descartes did not construct a wager like Pascal's. They constructed proofs for the existence of a God in which they believed and trusted. Those proofs are expressions not of will, but of mind: they are true or false; they may be verified or refuted. The Pascalian wager, by contrast, is an unhappily wary manner in which to win God. As Santayana said (in *Character and Opinion in the United States*), "betting on the improbable because you are offered big odds is an unworthy parody of the real choice between wisdom and folly." And it is a nonsensical manner in which to win meaning. Pascal could, he supposed, lose heaven. How can one lose meaning? Who wins the meaning that the gambler might lose? Moreover, and unlike Pascal's, Steiner's wager is pithless: his language is a religious skin only. He takes the language of hard religious belief, softens it into mere metaphor, then convinces himself that what he has is a hard metaphor that is the equivalent of religious belief.

But it is not an equivalent, nor should it be. Attend to Steiner's evasions: he writes that where we read truly, we do so not *because* the text incarnates meaning but *as if* it incarnates meaning. Again, he writes that we must follow Descartes's "wager"—but we must follow it only vaguely: "some such fundamental presupposition." Any similar fundamental presupposition will do, as long as it is very fundamental. And while on the one hand the text is taken to "incarnate" meaning, a word with a specific (Christian) gravity of embodiment, in the next sentence this incarnation is no more than an "enacted metaphor."

This is intellectually feeble. The doctrine of the Real Presence, in Christian practice, is guaranteed by belief in the greater incarnation of Christ, who is believed to be God made into man. There are, broadly, three kinds of belief in the Real Presence. Catholicism believes that in the communion service, which repeats Jesus's last supper, the bread and wine become the flesh and blood of Christ while remaining outwardly unchanged ("transubstantiation"); Protestantism believes that Jesus's body is present in the bread and wine ("consubstantiation"); and there are Christians, like the Zwinglians of old, who believe that neither happens, but that the communion service memorializes Christ's last supper. Is George Steiner a Zwinglian? It is only this last belief that comes close to the idea of an enacted metaphor. Most or-



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thodox belief takes incarnation to mean what it says, since Christ's incarnation is taken to mean what it says. The Real Presence is founded on God-given truth; and even the Zwinglian doctrine is founded on the possibility of memorializing God-given truth. None of these positions is a wager. And none is an enacted metaphor, unless Christ is an enacted metaphor.

"Incarnation" is not a word that should be used lightly, as Steiner does here. Not because to do so is blasphemous, but because to do so is meaningless. Incarnation promises the presence and guarantee of God. Nowhere does Steiner appear to believe in this final presence. His wager is not a wager on a presence real and final enough to guarantee meaning. Wagering on merely "a significant being" seems a mug's game.

Steiner is like a patient who reinfects himself by putting dirty bandages on his wounds. His own religiose language infects his doctrine of meaning, for it forces the very question that is necessary for this doctrine but entirely unnecessary outside it: Does Steiner believe in God? Or does he not? Either he is wagering meaning on God, or he is merely wagering meaning by gambling with language. But the latter is not far from what we do every day, habitually, without a theological language. A "leap into sense," which Steiner promises, is not the same as a leap into God. A leap into sense is how the secular day begins, and necessity has turned the leap, for most of us, into a daily stroll. A stroll, because we do not need to wager on sense when all our life it has seemed that this is a bet that has already been won for us. To wager thus would actually be senseless: the sun rises every day.

It is not obvious that great criticism or great art needs Steiner's theological postulate to live in the stability of truth and the transcendence of beauty. Steiner ignores the many great post-Renaissance artists who have gotten along without a theology or a language of theology, and have radiantly made do with a theology of art. This is what Proust hints in his essay on Ruskin, when he separates his own non-theological aestheticism from the Christian aestheticism of Ruskin, whose principal religion "was religion," as Proust puts it, and whose "wholly religious life was spent wholly aesthetically." Proust, who uses language exactly, calls Ruskin's aesthetic a "supernatural aesthetic." Steiner wants to enjoy a supernatural aesthetic without the obligation of supernatural belief. Ruskin worried about drinking tea while looking at Titian because Titian truly incarnated a Real Presence. Steiner fusses about eating breakfast while listening to Opus 131 because Opus 131 is an enacted metaphor ... of something or other.

One feels that Steiner is asking us to believe not in the presence of the divine but in the easier presence of undefined greatness. The test is easy to apply. Were Steiner proposing a doctrine of meaning, it would have to be a universal doctrine, just as Christianity is a universal doctrine. If great work incarnates a Real Presence, then minor or even bad work must do so also, for meaning, divine or otherwise, cannot be present only in masterpieces. Schubert's C major Quintet, which Steiner mentions ritualistically again and again, must incarnate meaning as, say, must a novel by Danielle Steele. The quality of the meaning is another matter; but vulgar meaning is not without any meaning at all. Ruskin worshiped and wrote about not only the stones of Venice, but also the stones and trees on simple hillsides, since both were incarnations of God's creativity. Nothing in the whole body of Steiner's work suggests that he could bring himself to apply his Real Presence democratically.

Steiner is dismissive of those who would hold him to theological accountability. At the end of his "Preface to the Hebrew Bible," he wonders aloud if the Bible is merely literature or the bearer of divine witness and revelation. Those who believe the latter, he says, are "fundamentalists." Those who believe the former, he thinks, are secularists. Having vandalized each side of this binarism, he decides that we need a third position—that nice and useful Real Presence. In fact, all that Steiner does here is bloat the Bible with mystery, but a mystery arrived at by the most vulgar route. What awes him, and finally convinces him that the Bible is quasi-divine ("*as if* divine"), is that he cannot imagine someone writing the Psalms or the Book of Job and then going to lunch.

That really is his argument, accompanied by swirls and swoons. He can just about imagine "Shakespeare remarking at home or to some intimate on whether or not work on *Hamlet* or *Othello* had, that day, gone well or poorly, as the case might be," and "then enquiring as to the price of cabbages," though this boggles his mind. But what he cannot do—or will not do?—is imagine the same about the writers of the Bible. "The picture of some man or woman, lunching, dining, after he or she had 'invented' and set down these and certain other biblical texts, leaves me, as it were, blinded and off balance." He forgets that the worldliness of these texts—the Psalmist crying to God in one breath and calling to his sheep in the next—is one of their high-


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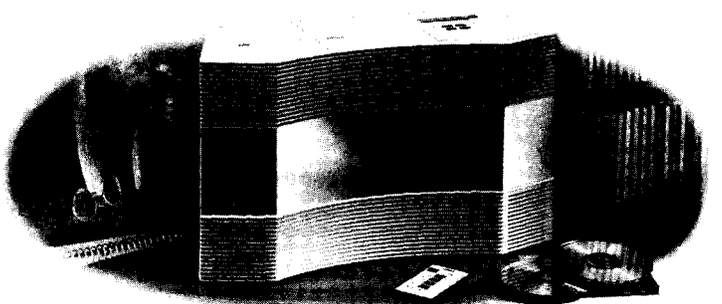

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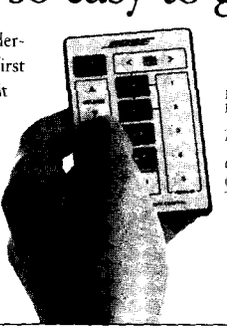

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est beauties.

The scriptures make him feel somewhat religious; therefore they are somewhat religious. That is Steiner's thrust, that is his Real Presence. He leaps into sublimity by deciding that the sublime cannot be vulgar, that you cannot write a Psalm and then eat. But he exaggerates vulgarity in order to exaggerate sublimity's lack of it; and in the end all he offers is a hedged secularism written up religiously. Elsewhere in his book he confesses to similar mystical goose bumps in relation to Kafka. That the parable "Before The Law" was written "by a gentleman in a bowler hat going to and from his daily insurance business, defies my grasp." And indeed it does. Truly this is not thought, but a fear of thought.

## II.

The retreat from the word has one other determinant: the Holocaust. In the Holocaust, art blithely coexisted with utmost evil. "We know of personnel in the bureaucracy of the torturers and the ovens who cultivated a knowledge of Goethe, a love of Rilke.... Nothing in the next-door world of Dachau impinged on the great winter cycle of Beethoven chamber music played in Munich." Heidegger wrote great philosophy almost within earshot of a concentration camp. In *In Bluebeard's Castle*, and in several essays in the new book, Steiner lays out the impotences that flow from this terrible knowledge. We can no longer believe in a necessary connection between high art and high behavior. "Voltaire and Arnold regarded as established the crucial lemma that the humanities humanize." But we have lost this certainty. "We have lost a characteristic élan, a metaphysic of 'forward dreaming' (of which Ernst Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* is the inspired statement)."

Perhaps, Steiner speculates, art encourages barbarism, for it wraps its audience in falsities that bloom larger for them than the dilemmas of reality. The obsessiveness of great art and great thought promotes a mandarinism careless of the world. A recurrent figure in Steiner's work is Archimedes, who would not relinquish his work on the algebra of conic sections even as the Romans came to kill him in his garden in Syracuse. Anthony Blunt, the British art historian and Soviet spy, inspired one of Steiner's best pieces for *The New Yorker*, and in it he orates on the scandalous disjunction of civilized activity and treason: "I would like to think for a moment about a man who in the morning teaches his students that a false attribution of a Watteau drawing ... is a sin against the spirit and in the afternoon or evening transmits to the agents of Soviet intelligence classified, perhaps vital information given to him in sworn trust by his countrymen and intimate colleagues. What are the sources of scission?"

As in much of Steiner's work, this is offered to us with first-night flamboyance, as if we were his virgins in knowledge. As in his discussion of religious faith, he erects melodramatic binarisms and does vulgar damage to precise thinking. The binarism is always at an hysterical pitch: philosophy or the death-camps; Watteau or treason; breakfast or Opus 131; a Real Presence or nihilism. Steiner's ruminations are not novel and they cloud thought. More calmly, and with deeper understanding, writers and philosophers have long considered the irresponsible power of art; it is a commonplace of theories of tragedy and of the sublime. Hazlitt, in his celebrated essay on *Coriolanus* and elsewhere, pointed out that poetry "delights in power, in strong excitement, as well as in truth," and that this "gives a Bias to the imagination often inconsistent with the greatest good," that "in Poetry it [the imagination] triumphs over Principle, and bribes the passions to make a sacrifice of common humanity."

Steiner has at times usefully reminded us of art's complicities with the inhumane. But Steiner is himself in love with the inhumane. This is gravely said. The despotic negligence, the God-like separateness, the vicious mysteries, the sickness or the madness of Kierkegaard or Kafka or Weil—these are the qualities that Steiner cherishes. He wants to be the voice out of the whirlwind; and if this cannot be, he will spend his life chasing the whirlwind. The political system that seems best to protect the life of great art, he thinks, is elitist, anti-democratic, unjust and possibly even totalitarian. This is where he would rather live, the better for whirlwind-chasing. In "An Uncommon Reader," written in 1978, he notes that one country where the old codes of "classic literacy" survive—remembrance, learning by heart, fiercely held private libraries, ideas to live and die for—is the (then) Soviet Union. Were Steiner to have to choose, he would choose, for art's sake, something closer to the Soviet dispensation than to the American, democratic, meliorist dispensation.

The very idea of speculating about choosing between these systems—as if such momentousness were up for grabs, as if this were all a kind of ghastly, mutilated consumerism—is not only null but offensive. Since we are fortunate enough not to have to choose between tyranny and freedom, we should not choose rhetorically between them. But this is just what Steiner does in "The Archives of Eden," his notorious essay of 1978, reprinted here. Steiner is like someone who, seeing a blind man in the street, says, "I would rather be deaf than blind." He begins by charging America with having produced very little of great artistic or intellectual achievement. Its classical music is eccentric; its philosophy is limited, with no great work done in the areas of metaphysics or ethics; its mathematics, where there has been real achievement, has been largely by imported Europeans; its fine art of any quality is simply an epilogue to European modernism and surrealism; its theology lacks anyone of Karl Barth's stature.

## *Proof*

Not to show off, but elaborating some philosophical assertion, "Watch her open her mouth,"
says the guardian of an elderly, well-dressed retarded woman to the little circle of ladies
companionably gathered under a just-flowering chestnut this lusciously balmy Sunday.

She moves her hand in to everyone else an imperceptible gesture, her charge opens wide,
a peanut to murmurs of approbation is inserted, though all absorbed again as they are,
nobody sees when a moment later it slips from the still-visible tongue to the lip, then falls,

the mouth staying tensely agape, as though news of a great calamity had just reached it,
as though in eternity's intricate silent music someone had frighteningly mis-struck a chord,
so everything else has to hold, too, lovers strolling, children setting boats out on the pond,

until the guardian takes notice and says not unkindly, "Close, dear," which is dutifully done,
and it all can start over: voices, leaves, water, air; always the yearning, sensitive air,
urging against us, aspiring to be us, the light striking across us: signs, covenants, codes.

**C.K. Williams**



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Only America's literature has what he calls "claims to classic occasion." But in this century, "the summits are *not* American: they are: Thomas Mann, Kafka, Joyce, Proust." There is not, in America, (to be Steiner-ish for a moment) a Stravinsky or a Schoenberg, a Kandinsky or a Picasso, a Heidegger, a Wittgenstein, a Sartre.

Steiner proceeds characteristically, eating his way through great works as a bat in flight blindly gobbles insects, a thousand a minute. America, he decides, is a culture devoted to the custody of European work. It has the best museums and galleries, the greatest research centers, the finest holdings of manuscripts; but it is not a place where great creation is going on. Also, America in this century has become the richest and freest land on earth, while Europe has twice erupted into warfare and barbarism. This correlation between creativity and catastrophe suggests much about the relative qualities of these two societies, and the place that art is accorded in them. Steiner speculates that since art is always the preserve of the few, a society devoted to the liberation of the many, such as America, will not be the cradle for art's prospering. The American ideal is that of "material progress and recompense. *Fortuna* is fortune."

Liberal democratic meliorism is no home for the greatness that is always made by the few for the few. Such a society, aflame with "libertarian cant," may actually conspire against the production of great work. Meanwhile, it seems to be the case that great art is either produced in conditions of elitism (Pericles's Athens, Racine's France) or, in the modern age, in the nearest equivalent of this, which are the totalitarian regimes of Latin America or the Soviet Union. (Steiner's essay has grown crow's-feet since 1978.) He quotes Borges, who once said "Censorship is the mother of metaphor," and Joyce, who said: "We artists are olives; squeeze us." He points out that the Russian novel in this century has an urgency and a desperation that American fiction cannot rival.

One of the many slynesses of Steiner's sensations is that he affects the motions of argument while actually standing completely still. One is never in any doubt as to which side Steiner is on in this grotesque fight, but he must pretend to see things from the American side. To be sure, he simpers, there will be prices to pay on both sides. You can have torture, injustice and restricted access in Europe; or you can have wealth, health and the mindless pursuit of happiness in America. And to be sure, he pretends, only a monster would choose Europe. "No play by Racine is worth a Bastille, no Mandelstam poem an hour of Stalinism." America has done the decent thing: "If a choice must be made, let humane mediocrity prevail." Steiner is merely being honest in laying out the costs. What he cannot stand are those—"and they have been legion in American academe or the media"—who "want it both ways." For those who espouse the highest standards while preaching the liberal democracy that undermines those very standards, Steiner has only contempt.

There are a number of responses to this vicious incoherence. The swiftest and most majestic was provided by Joseph Brodsky, who knew firsthand the tyrannies that are only pornographic to Steiner. Years ago Brodsky and Steiner appeared on a British television program. Steiner set out his anti-democratic stall. He spoke for fifteen minutes. Small and quivering, cold-eyed, he emanated a punitive hysteria. He spoke in rolling discourses, hardly pausing for breath, vigorous with triumphalist evasions. He resembled one of those petit-bourgeois maniacs or upstarts who crowd the drawing-rooms and sniff the action in Dostoevsky's novels. He presented the argument of "The Archives of Eden." Then he stopped. And quietly, with thick dignity, Brodsky responded: "Yes, but liberty is the greatest masterpiece."

That is all that needs to be said. By insisting on his own lovely metaphor, Brodsky was reminding Steiner that although censorship may be "the mother of metaphor," censorship is not itself a metaphor. For when torture is discussed speculatively by someone who has known only freedom, it is being discussed metaphorically. This is the real affront of Steiner's essay. It is a rhetoric of choice indulged in by a man who is fortunate enough to have never had to choose; and his choice is for a system in which people have never been allowed to choose. He makes a choice for not being able to choose. His essay is thus an exhausted liberty.

But it is also a nonsense. One cannot choose tyranny. No one would actually do so; so Steiner's argument is strictly meaningless. But to make it seem meaningful, he must give us the illusion that one can choose between such things. He despises those who "want it both ways." The implication is clear. Steiner is the more honest for wanting it only one way, and this is the way of elitist, even totalitarian regimes. He moves from the speculative to the prescriptive. It is as if Steiner, having decided that he would rather be blind than deaf, asks to be forcibly blinded, the better to develop his hearing.


# LAW AND THE COMPANY WE KEEP

## AVIAM SOIFER

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"If a choice must be made," he writes. But a choice must not be made, and has never been made. This rhetoric of choice pushes Steiner toward facile linkages: we want or choose a dispensation (America has apparently "chosen" humane mediocrity) and this dispensation uncomplicatedly "produces" certain works of art and thought. Ironically, this great anti-American here speaks a language of pure consumerism, of choice and product. Culture is a factory floor, and he is the bullying foreman.

But Steiner conflates elitism and totalitarianism. He begins by comparing Europe and America. By the end of the essay he is speaking of the Soviet Union. Most of his examples of European greatness are not Russian, yet the force of his melodrama is toward squaring off totalitarianism against American freedom. (This is a binarism he indulges with equal melodrama in his recent novella, *Proofs*, in which two men discuss the pros and cons of the American and Russian systems.) But much of modern European art, while labored on in the midst of injustice, has been created in conditions that are closer to democracy than to tyranny. And much ordinary art—Britain in the twentieth century: not a single one of Steiner's examples of greatness is British—has been produced in elitist, class-sodden cultures.

Steiner is not, in fact, making a political contrast at all, though he thinks he is. He is not setting banal freedom against special illiberality. He is comparing several very ancient societies with one relatively new one. This is not a comparison. Borges actually and politically repressed is very different from Joyce yearning for (if he really did yearn for) intellectual repression. One lived in a police state and one lived in democratic Europe. Steiner thinks, for example, that it is a neat jibe to end his essay by pledging his faith in Archimedes's garden in Syracuse. "My hunch is that it [the labor of greatness] lies in Syracuse still—Sicily, that is, rather than New York." But the two Syracuses have much in common. Both are places of liberal democracy, even if the Italian version is corruptly unstable. What divides them is antiquity, not politics. Indeed, if one set out to become a great writer, then Syracuse, New York, might be a more hospitable place than Syracuse, Sicily. A great writer did grow up in Syracuse, New York, and briefly attended university there. His name was Stephen Crane.

Had Steiner, in 1978, fought like with like—posed a newish totalitarian society against a newish liberal one—what would have been America's proper rival? South Africa, perhaps. And to anyone familiar with its literature (doubtless not "great" enough to attract Steiner's attention) South Africa gives the lie to the idea that totalitarianism produces, in some uncomplicated causal way, great work. On the contrary, in South Africa totalitarianism has produced an enfeebled, minor literature with occasional peaks. And it is a literature whose constant subject has been, inevitably and limitingly, power and repression and the corruptions of society. J. M. Coetzee said this about it in his Jerusalem Prize speech of 1987: "It is a less than fully human literature, unnaturally preoccupied with power and the torsions of power.... It is exactly the kind of literature you would expect people to write from a prison."

Steiner complains that America is a museum culture. But Steiner is himself a museum of European monuments. In Steiner's museum all the monuments are in conspiracy with each other. One monument leads to another. Without Kafka, says Steiner, "we would not have Beckett's clowns." But those of us who cherish literary greatness see that, contra Steiner, greatness is not always dynastic. The critic's truest wager is made not on an unarguably great God, but on the foundling, the unparented work that no one has yet raised to greatness. America is incomprehensible to George Steiner because it is a country which has produced masterpieces but not dynasties of monuments. It is a country that has often had to cast off European monuments in order to create American masterpieces. It is a country in which passionate languages of art have been spoken without need of theology. George Steiner offers a parody of Europeanness while fighting a parody of Americanness. America eludes him. In America's museums and libraries are the great European works that populate Steiner's family of giants; but its true vitalities fly. •

# *The Mystery of Progress*

**By Cass R. Sunstein**

## India: Economic Development and Opportunity by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen

**(Oxford University Press, 312 pp., $45)**

This is an election year and countless books are appearing on the proper role of government, on the nature and the limits of free markets, on the importance of greater economic growth, on the question of whether government should intervene more or less in society. The very best of these books, the one with the most powerful claim on the attention of serious Americans, is not about America at all. The subject of this short, lively and important book is India. Do not be misled by that. What Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen have to say is highly illuminating, I am sure, for students of India and for students of development (I am neither); but their lessons are more general and far-reaching. Their arguments and their data hold many surprises and implications for other countries, including our own.

Dreze and Sen set out to answer a crucial question: How do we know whether a country is doing well? In many nations, and in many international organizations, the basic measure of well-being is Gross Domestic Product, or GDP. (GDP refers to the total quantity of goods and services produced, weighted by their prices.) Dreze and Sen think that this is an unfortunate standard of measurement. Even with an impressive GDP, even with strong economic growth, a country may have high mortality rates, terrible literacy levels and many people in desperate conditions. To show what is wrong with GDP as a measurement of progress, and to measure progress in another way, they argue that it is important to focus on people's capabilities—what individual people are actually able to do and be, or more technically, "the alternative combinations of functionings from which a person can choose. Thus, the notion of capabilities is essentially one of freedom—the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead."

This is a disarmingly simple idea (on which Sen has worked for many years), but it is a very useful way of reorienting inquiry away from per capita GDP and toward something more promising. In this understanding, for example, desperately poor people, like people subject to unjust state imprisonment, can be seen to lack real opportunity; they face "capability deprivation." So, too, for people



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who are uneducated or in bad health. Schooling and medical care are particularly important, since education and health have intrinsic and instrumental value. They are goods in themselves, and they are goods because they provide capabilities and hence allow us to have other goods, too.

If we see things in this light, we can conclude that GDP is a very crude measure of whether a society is doing well. Thus Dreze and Sen show that some nations (Sri Lanka, Jamaica) with low GDP still provide relatively long lives for their citizens and show decent educational attainment. Some nations with high GDP do badly on both counts, such as Thailand, South Korea and especially Singapore, which, despite terrific economic growth, has yet to overtake poorer nations such as Costa Rica in life expectancy. (The United States, by the way, is a great success in terms of per capita GDP, ranking first in the world, but we do less well in educational attainment and relatively poorly in life expectancy, ranking sixteenth.) Some countries concerned with GDP have provided "unaimed opulence," which is certainly better than no opulence at all; but in Dreze's and Sen's view, this is an unpromising model for India and other states. The high growth of Brazil, for instance, has been combined with high levels of poverty, ill health, child labor and criminal violence.

Dreze and Sen conclude that an evaluation of a society's performance must focus on its role in promoting human capabilities. And, while they do not suggest a numerical measure, they do refer to the United Nation's Human Development Index, producing numerical rankings based on per capita GDP, educational attainment and longevity. The "capabilities approach" is the first of two foundations for the discussion of India's performance. The second is a wholesale attack on the persistent opposition between markets and government (or markets and law). Dreze and Sen argue that markets and government are not separate, that they are analytically and actually interdependent. Without governmental protection of contracts and property rights, markets cannot exist. Those who are pro-market cannot really be anti-government. In their essence, markets require both government and law. Moreover, the initial distribution of resources, from which market ordering begins, requires government action; those initial distributions do not fall from the sky. And economic growth that relies on markets may be well-nurtured by government, especially in developing countries. Thus the governments of the celebrated "four tigers"—South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore—are hardly devoted to laissez-faire capitalism; on the contrary, they have engaged in a range of active policies to promote rapid industrialization.

To understand the relationship between governments and markets, Dreze and Sen introduce an illuminating distinction between market-excluding initiatives and market-complementary initiatives. We can imagine market prohibitions banning exchanges that would otherwise occur (such as rent control or minimum wage laws) and also market complements that do not ban exchanges at all (such as job training programs and public health services). Dreze and Sen are somewhat wary of market-excluding measures. They see only a limited place for interferences with free markets in the form of minimum wage and rent control laws. This is not because they oppose redistribution, but because interferences with the market are, as a matter of fact, unlikely to be an effective way of helping poor people.

You do not help people who are in bad conditions by preventing them from taking advantage of the best option they have. Liberals often think that people who end up with a bad deal are assisted if government bans the deal; but the real problem is the unequal distribution of resources, and legal bans on exchange do nothing about that problem. In any case, "market exchange is sometimes a factor of liberation for disadvantaged sections of the population."

Dreze and Sen believe, on the other hand, that market-complementary initiatives have great promise. They think that India should devote great attention to such initiatives. Their important conclusion is that it is fully possible to argue at the same time for greater use of market institutions and for a range of initiatives that go beyond markets.

And so, with this analytical background, Dreze and Sen proceed to investigate India. How has India's performance compared to that of similarly situated countries? Since 1960, living conditions in the developing world have improved dramatically. Infant mortality has been cut by more than half; real per capita income has nearly tripled; life expectancy has jumped from 46 years to 63 years. Comparatively speaking, however, India—which by itself accounts for over half of the combined population of the fifty-two most deprived countries—has not done well. The "four tigers" are far ahead of India in many ways, but the comparison with China may be the most illuminating. Living conditions in China and India were about the same in 1949. And, since that time, China has shot dramatically ahead. Its per capita income is about twice that of India. Life expectancy at birth is ten years higher in China (69) than in India (59). The literacy rate is much higher in China, 87 percent vs. 64 percent among males, with an astonishing disparity of 68 percent vs. 39 percent among females.

It is tempting to attribute these differences to China's stunningly successful economic liberalization. But Dreze and Sen show that the temptation to focus only on market reforms should be resisted. To be sure, China's economic growth has soared since the reforms, but even before that time China accomplished a great deal in promoting people's capabilities, despite poor economic growth. Between 1949 and 1979, there were remarkable reductions in chronic undernourishment, tremendous gains in health care and nutritional support, and large reductions in infant mortality and child mortality. What is especially striking is how much China did to promote human capabilities in the absence of economic growth. Indeed, with respect to life expectancy and child mortality, China's post-1979 record is *less* impressive than it was between 1949 and 1979. Thus China is a terrific case study in the limited power of economic growth to improve general well-being. (Along similar lines, Dreze and Sen engage in inter-Indian comparisons, pointing out that the state of Kerala has used its resources well despite limited growth, producing male and female literacy rates of 98 percent and life expectancy rates of 72 years, well above China's.)

But there is one dimension in which India has done strikingly better than China: the prevention of famine. India has had no famines, whereas China has suffered from several, especially between 1958 and 1961, when over 23 million people died from starvation. In a most important finding, Dreze and Sen attribute the difference to the existence of a free press in India. (Sen discussed this finding in these pages in "Freedoms and Needs," TNR, January 10 & 17, 1994.) Remarkably, there has never in the history of the world been a substantial famine in a democratic country, in a state with political liberties. Since China lacks political liberty, the government did not receive information about the nature and the magnitude of the famines until it was much too late.

With this point, Dreze and Sen establish a powerful link between political liberty and economic well-being. Extrapolating from the salutary effects of



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democracy in acting against famines, Dreze and Sen insist that an engaged public can help reduce social and economic inequalities in general. Thus they argue for a range of measures designed to promote greater public engagement with an eye toward reducing these inequalities.

What about population control? Many countries are now experiencing population "crises," and some countries lacking such crises (the United States in particular) are concerned about the existence of excessive births to young women, especially those who are unmarried. Here, too, the comparison between China and India is illuminating. China's population program consists of its well-known "one child" policy, and a number of nations are deciding whether to do something similar. Should India follow China's lead? Dreze and Sen think not—because of the interest in freedom, but also because there are more effective methods for controlling population growth. In a particularly striking claim, Dreze and Sen assert that the most successful methods for controlling excessive childbirth involve increased female literacy and increased female participation in the labor force. When women get decent education and have decent job prospects, they don't get pregnant as young or as often. The best solution to the problem of excessive or unwanted pregnancy is to provide better life prospects to girls.

Dreze and Sen are particularly concerned with the question whether "liberalization," understood as deregulation and greater reliance on free markets, is an appropriate response to the problems faced by contemporary India. Their answer is mixed. On the one hand, they show that liberalization can promote economic growth and in that way produce a great deal of good. Many "capability deprivations" are a product of stultifying regulation. On the other hand, liberalization cannot do all that needs to be done, and Dreze and Sen think that the current government is far too focused on the removal of counterproductive regulations.

Dreze and Sen emphasize the central importance of such positive activities as education, social security, health care and land reform (redistribution in the form of land entitlements). For India, basic education is perhaps the central issue. Despite a constitutional right to free and compulsory education until the age of 14, the state of Indian education is dismally bad, and many millions of children are illiterate or barely educated. This point, incidentally, contains a lesson about the limitations of constitutional rights. Sometimes they are not worth the paper on which they are written, especially when they create rights to costly state assistance.

The literacy rate in India is much lower than in comparable countries. As correctives, Dreze and Sen suggest the need for greater spending on education, for increasing the number of teachers, and for promoting greater vigilance from parents in monitoring educational performance. They are also concerned to ensure that social arrangements "protect all members of society from extreme deprivation and insecurity." Aware of the enormous difficulty in carrying out such reforms in India, Dreze and Sen say that labor-intensive public works programs are less expensive than welfare programs, and land entitlements, supportive credit and school meals can be provided even in a poor nation. With respect to public health, Dreze and Sen show that great improvements have been made through child immunization; and for the future they urge a shift away from family planning, which dominates current policy, to other health services.

Dreze and Sen place a particular emphasis on the topic of sex equality, and what they say here should be of special interest to Americans. "The agency of women as a force for change," they write, "is one of the most neglected aspects of the development literature." On this count, the particular contribution of their book—which bypasses the dreary, unproductive and mostly rhetorical American debates over whether women are "victims"—is to stress the importance, for both men and women, of increased female agency. For a long time Sen has maintained that tens of millions and perhaps hundreds of millions of women are "missing." That is, discriminatory social practices have resulted in the death of millions of women who would be alive today if girls received the same nutritional care and the same health care as boys. India has an exceptionally low female-to-male ratio, a problem attributable to the deliberate neglect of the nutritional and health needs of girls. What is surprising is Dreze's and Sen's assertion that the patriarchal social norms of the higher castes seem to produce lower female-male ratios. The spread of higher caste norms, which has accompanied economic growth, has actually made things worse for girls.

What might make things better? When women are educated, the anti-female bias in survival is substantially reduced, perhaps owing to the power to protect themselves that women thereby acquire, perhaps owing to general changes in social attitudes and practices. Female literacy has an enormous effect in reducing child mortality. As noted, an effective way to reduce excessive birth rates is to ensure that women have decent educations and job opportunities. From this it emerges that economic growth and deregulation are not likely to produce sex equality. Sex inequality is not a product of wealth or poverty but of social attitudes and norms, which can limit freedom. "Capability deprivation" and the denial of basic liberty are not solely a consequence of law. They can be a consequence of culture, of traditional values. Hence positive government is indispensable.

"Gender inequality is not only a social failure in itself, it also leads to other social failures." How might sex equality help men? Dreze and Sen show that states in which women play an important social and economic role have done unusually well in improving health and in reducing mortality and fertility rates. Economic productivity is itself likely to be increased if women have a diverse range of options. A careful comparison of regions in India tends to confirm this fact.

The great debate between "too much market" or "too little market" is misleading, in Dreze's and Sen's account. It gives an inadequate sense of India's real options. Dreze and Sen insist that India needs to move "well beyond liberalization." Along with American free marketeers, they insist that liberalization can do a lot of good. But liberalization must be supplemented by a range of positive devices by which the state can promote human development. These include health care, social security and land reform, and also the creation of a credible legal system, better rural infrastructure and sound environmental policies.

This is an exceptionally impressive analysis, rich with implications. It is clear-headed about tangled theoretical issues and jammed with facts. Still, at least three questions come to mind. The first has to do with the word "equality." The word appears in many places in Dreze's and Sen's book, and it is always a term of approval. But it isn't clear enough. For nothing in the book supports a thoroughgoing egalitarianism, by which I mean an effort to ensure that all people have the same resources. In fact, Dreze and Sen are not urging equal distributions at all. At most points they are proposing three much narrower ideas: ensuring that some groups are not systematically



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positioned below others, reducing extreme disparities with respect to capabilities, and providing protection against desperate or near-desperate conditions ("capability deprivation"). Those who reject egalitarianism might well agree that a society ought to guarantee decent prospects and a decent minimum for all.

The second question has to do with pathologies of politics. Dreze and Sen are strongly in favor of greater political engagement and more effective governance. They think that the former promotes the latter, especially when they focus on the example of famine. But the example may be misleading. Of course democratization is desirable for developing countries—and yet a highly politicized citizenry is no guarantee of governmental effectiveness. What Dreze and Sen do not discuss is the risk that a mobilized citizenry, focused above all on distributional issues, will divert political energy toward unproductive haggling over proper shares of taxpayer resources. Redistribution to the poor is one thing; redistribution to self-interested private groups is quite another. The authors' intriguingly optimistic discussion of the mutually supportive relations between democracy and development would have been stronger if they had dealt with the peculiar difficulties of interest-group politics.

The third question has to do with Dreze's and Sen's somewhat abstract and sketchy discussion of education, health care and social security. It is more than plausible to say, about India, that more should be spent on education. But evidence from elsewhere does not demonstrate that greater per-pupil expenditures actually improve education. In America, there is reason to think that a real problem is an insufficiently competitive system for the recruitment of teachers, so the best applicants are not hired. In the light of Dreze's and Sen's own analysis of the inadequacy of a simple opposition between markets and government, and taking their point even more seriously than they do, we can imagine a wide range of possible mixtures of public and private education, perhaps including some kind of voucher policy of the sort now receiving substantial attention in the United States.

But Dreze and Sen say little about such mixed systems. This is a gap in their discussion of health care, too. It is right to urge improved health care, but what kind of health care policy would work best for India or elsewhere? And the term "social security" is quite abstract. Budget constraints limit the appropriate design of such a program, especially in a poor country, and there is an omnipresent risk that a generous social security program will diminish work incentives. Dreze and Sen are well aware of this; they might have said more about the many forms of "social security" and about the trade-offs among them.

Despite these shortcomings, however, this is a work whose general implications deserve widespread attention. The point bears a great deal on contemporary debates in America, where economic growth is often viewed as a cure for everything. Dreze and Sen show that this view is hugely mistaken. We should agree that a society with high growth rates may have large levels of misery, because millions of its people are poorly educated, or because decent health care is unavailable, or because the gains from growth are not widely distributed. We should agree, too, in India but also in America, to move beyond the unhelpful debate about whether we need "more" or "less" government, "more" or "less" reliance on markets. Dreze and Sen cut through the many confusions in this debate and demonstrate that the only issues worth exploring are far more concrete than these misleading platitudes. It makes sense for citizens in America as well as India to favor greater reliance on markets *and* to embrace an active government role in such areas as education, health care, social security and environmental protection.

In a few short pages, moreover, Dreze and Sen cast light on a number of questions about sex equality that are sharply and unnecessarily dividing people in the West, feminists and nonfeminists alike. For those interested in the well-being of women, the crucial issue is what women can do and can be. Sometimes "traditional values" can be the problem, not the solution, in developing and developed countries alike. Constraints on the agency of women, especially with respect to reproduction and sexuality, originate in social norms and traditions as well as in positive law. Norms, traditions and laws contribute in many nations to excessively high rates of childbirth, especially (but not only) outside of marriage, in a way that creates problems for women, children and society as a whole. In some nations, these problems are being handled through criminal punishment and other forms of coercion. In the United States, by contrast, the remedy of choice appears to be an odd combination of moralistic sloganeering, punitive manipulation of the welfare system, and millions of abortions


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every year. If Dreze and Sen are correct, the best way to respond to the situation is through educational and employment policies that promise women decent life prospects. Policymakers in New Delhi, Beijing and Washington, D.C. could do much worse than to take this idea seriously.

CASS R. SUNSTEIN's new book, *Free Markets and Social Justice*, will be published this winter by Oxford University Press.

# *Passion Flower*

**BY GERALD EARLY**

## Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn by David Hajdu

**(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 306 pp., $27.50)**

Duke Ellington, in his life as a revered American artist, and in his afterlife as a sacred American institution, has generated his fair share of commentary, but it has never adequately explained him. Perhaps the new interest in Billy Strayhorn is simply a more ingenious way to get at Ellington's art and personality. What might be unlocked about Ellington when he is seen as a mentor to, or a director of, another composer's talents? If there was a time when we might have seen a simplicity in the relationship between Ellington and Strayhorn, an American innocence of the Huck and Jim sort, that time is gone. We are inclined instead to suspect something more disturbingly complicated and less easily rendered in the glow of idealized pedagogy or friendship. These days we prefer to detect a bit of the diabolical in the story of these two men, and in this way to see through the surface of Ellington's music and Ellington's psyche.

Did one man unfairly overshadow the other? Did one man use the other for his own greater glory? Was the great Ellington industry a conspiracy to insure the great Ellington reputation? "Billy [Strayhorn] to me is the boss of the arrangers," Quincy Jones said many years ago. "I'd like to really know just what's what in that little lab of theirs. I'd like to know how much Billy is responsible for in Duke's work these days." This remains a real question, and it is why, we are told in the preface, David Hajdu wrote his book. Who, really, was Billy Strayhorn? What, really, was his relationship to Duke Ellington? But nothing emerges from Hajdu's research that suggests anything quite so iniquitous as Ellington "taking bows for another composer" or Strayhorn being denied the credit that he was due. Indeed, despite the rather ominous tone of the preface, Ellington's reputation emerges intact from this book, even a bit enhanced; and he remains as elusive as ever.

Strayhorn had nothing like Ellington's Whitmanesque grandeur. Ellington could contain multitudes, and the multitudes included Strayhorn. It was Strayhorn's biggest break to become a supporting cast member in the Ellington show. Without Ellington, Strayhorn might have become as honored a tunesmith as Andy Razaf, as honored an arranger as Sy Oliver or Don Redman, as honored a composer as Oliver Nelson, all of them musicians of extraordinary talent. But it was his association with Ellington that has given Strayhorn his standing as a genius, a reputation that, deserved or not, transcends the reputation of those other men.

"I don't have any position for you," Ellington told Strayhorn when he hired him. "You'll do whatever you feel like doing." And in some ways this is exactly what Strayhorn did for the rest of his life. True, Ellington assigned arrangement duties to him (Ellington was always over-committed), and even had Strayhorn and Mercer Ellington compose a new book for the band during the ASCAP music ban of 1941. (That was how "Take the 'A' Train," one of Strayhorn's most famous tunes, became the Ellington band's theme song.) But Ellington was not just Strayhorn's boss or collaborator, he was also Strayhorn's patron. Strayhorn wound up working for precisely the right person and in precisely the right situation. Ellington totally supported him. Strayhorn had a great deal of free time to develop his own musical projects, time that he did not use altogether wisely.

The trombonist and arranger Billy Byers said: "It turned out that Strays was the indulgent artist and Ellington was the professional; Ellington worked like a dog, and Strayhorn was the playboy. He was drunk and hanging out all the time." Strayhorn was never as driven as Ellington, nor was he willing to take on Ellington's magnitude of responsibility in keeping the organization going. "Duke's success in keeping his band together during the years when other big bands were unable to stay in business was a minor miracle," wrote the bassist Bill Crow. "He pumped his ASCAP royalties into the payroll, and he kept salaries as low as he could." Marian Logan, the wife of Ellington's physician and a good friend of Strayhorn, observed that "Strays liked to have a collaborator. He liked somebody to hide behind." I do not mean, with all this, to deny Strayhorn's importance to Ellington. But Strayhorn needed Ellington more than Ellington needed Strayhorn. Strayhorn will never be an obscure or minor figure because Ellington will never be an obscure or minor figure.

Strayhorn was capable of writing good swing tunes, such as "Take the 'A' Train" or "Tonk," or clever variations of bop tunes, such as "Raincheck" (which Tadd Dameron would have been proud to have written), or just good pop songs with a blues flavor, such as "Satin Doll." The range of what he could do well in jazz and pop was staggering. Only Ellington could do more. Strayhorn is largely known, though, for his ballads, for "Something to Live For" or "Passion Flower." Yet these songs are really more than ballads. They have a languid, reflective quality, a quality that brings Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" to mind, something ornate but not Byzantine, suggestive of both tragedy and decadence. It is a very different quality than that usually conjured by such lyricism. The pieces do not convey homesickness, as in Keith Jarrett, or holy loneliness, as in John Coltrane. They convey, rather, a kind of philosophical fatigue, the arch sacredness located within the very rich profaneness that so engaged Strayhorn his entire life.

Strayhorn's most characteristic music was powerfully evocative, but it was never static or merely moody. He used the full tonal palette of the band, much like Ellington. And he knew how to use blues as well as Ellington did. He could find a great deal in the blues mood without requiring that a tune adhere strictly to the blues form. His music was never sentimental or pretentious, which are the two great flaws of lyrical jazz. One can see how Strayhorn would have been



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taken by arrangers such as Bill Challis or Boyd Raeburn, and how arrangers such as Gil Evans and Gerald Wilson were taken by him.

Strayhorn is particularly interesting to contemporary critics of American culture because he sat at the center—he conjoined, really—three intriguing marginalities: he was black, he was a jazz musician, he was homosexual. It is difficult to understand the man without taking all three of his marginalities as equal measures of his humanity. The balancing of all these identities must have alienated Strayhorn from aspects of himself. His homosexuality probably estranged him in some measure from African American life, or from that considerable segment of the African American community that, for religious, political or temperamental reasons, is homophobic. And his blackness must have alienated him, to some degree, from the white homosexual and artistic community, where he may have sought a more complete refuge.

As Hajdu's sources testify in this biography, being a black homosexual—long before our enlightened times, in which such a figure could provide the spice of "diversity" and the militant resentment of his victimhood to any mainstream gathering—was no easy road to tread. And this must have been especially true during the 1950s and early 1960s, when aggressive anti-Communism was associated with aggressive masculinity, and homosexuality was deplored as nearly a form of depravity and treason. Those were the years in which leaders of the civil rights movement, pressured by this mood, were uneasy about making their major push with either Bayard Rustin or James Baldwin too closely tied to them. Even in the black church, the homosexual choir director was something of a cultural stereotype, even a comic stereotype, that everyone winked at while they condemned homosexuality as an abomination in the sight of the God, a withering hypocrisy that could only have made the homosexual choir director more of a cynic and less of a Christian. (This was certainly Baldwin's quarrel with the Christian orthodoxy of his youth.)

There has always been a certain macho character or masculine mystique about jazz that Strayhorn secretly may have found amusing, and probably phony, and a bit distancing as well. There is something endearing in Strayhorn's nickname, Sweet Pea, but something also a bit condescending. He adopted the masks of the dilettante and the cosmopolitan, like Countee Cullen, the Harlem Renaissance poet, and Alain Locke, the philosopher and literary critic, both homosexuals, and in this way found a place for himself outside his specialized musical life. These figures developed, to use Cullen's term for his own attitude, a "pagan" view of the world, characterized by a certain indulgence, a taste for the good life, an emphatic elegance—a cultural extravagance which was a form of self-protection and an ironical disdain toward, and sense of absurdity about, the world of bourgeois, Christian values. Jazz itself can be seen as a sign of the degeneracy of cultural relativism or a sign of the liberation of the world from outmoded, puritanical, European values.

All these people—like the homosexuals, black and white, of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, the era that Strayhorn would have found most satisfying as a black artist—were in the arts or in show-business, where sartorial splendor and the polished veneer of a glib tongue, the hallmarks of a certain ideal of elegance, were useful for the articulation of marginality in fantasies of sophistication and refinement. And this ideal of elegance was not confined to the theaters and the dance halls. Black preachers, including many fundamentalist leaders of off-beat spiritual sects, often dressed lavishly and spoke in a rococo language.

Hajdu does not adequately explore the complex origins of the mannerisms of glamour as they connected the world of the homosexual with the world of the theater, and the world of blacks whose very marginality was almost the sole source of their "pagan" charisma—pagan at least in the eyes of the whites who were drawn to them and their art, because blacks were seen as being free of guilt. (The homosexual, of course, did not bring freedom from guilt; but he brought freedom from bourgeois domesticity and a notion of sex considered aesthetically.) Hajdu fails to evoke with any vividness the world of the black and white homosexual within the jazz and show-business community. There are eyewitness reports from Hajdu's homosexual informants and some fairly good accounts of Strayhorn's membership in certain groups in New York in the 1950s, but none of this is adequately linked to the story of Strayhorn's youth or to a larger cultural or historical analysis of the meaning of homosexuality in the worlds in which Strayhorn lived or in the art that he made.

Hajdu is not unique in missing the wider implications of this connection between jazz, homosexuality, race and the habits of "pagan" elegance. Some of the most brilliant of Ellington's partisans—Ralph Ellison, Albert Murray, Stanley Crouch—argue that his ideal of elegance was an indication of the self-sufficiency and the positive values of African American life and culture, but their edifying readings tend to simplify the painful and sometimes contradictory ways in which marginalities are negotiated and commodified in a free market culture. It seems as much of a mistake to say, in essence, that the Negro's cultural authenticity is legitimated by his "elegance" as it is to say that his cultural authenticity is legitimated by his deprivation. Elegance is an external attribute, a kind of show; it is no guarantee of inner worth. It may actually be the reverse: a sign of the complete subversion of inner worth. Elegance is an ambiguous, even diabolical thing. It is as capable of signifying decadence as it is of signifying competence and other edifying qualities of character, art or culture.

Billy Strayhorn was born on November 29, 1915, in Dayton, Ohio, nine years after the death of the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, the most famous black person to have been born in Dayton

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before Strayhorn. In 1920, the Strayhorn family moved to Pittsburgh, where Strayhorn grew up. The Strayhorns came to Pittsburgh at the same time as the migration that brought hundreds of thousands of Southern blacks to the industrialized north before and after World War I. Between 1910 and 1930, Pittsburgh's black population doubled. Pittsburgh was slowly sinking past its prime, but its decline was not yet complete: the 1920s saw a great black cultural and political awareness in the city. These were the years in which *The Pittsburgh Courier* came into its own as one of the major black newspapers in the country, second, arguably, only to *The Chicago Defender*. It had the best sports coverage of any black paper in the United States; it led the protest against the Amos and Andy radio show in the early 1930s (both of which indicate how important cultural issues had become for the black protest struggle by the 1920s); and it led a campaign to try to free Marcus Garvey from prison. It supported striking UMN members, in 1926, against inexperienced black strikebreakers who were endangering themselves and the cause of union organizing.

The black Pittsburgh of Strayhorn's youth was by no means a backwater. Earl Hines, born ten years before Strayhorn, grew up in Duquesne, a suburb of Pittsburgh, and developed his art there in what was a world of considerable black musicianship. Even before the 1930s when, as Hajdu correctly points out, Pittsburgh became one of the centers for Negro League baseball, there was a thriving sports scene among both the black and white working-classes there, connected to the Settlement House mission work with this exploding section of the population. (Hajdu's description of black Pittsburgh, before and during Strayhorn's youth, is no more than adequate.)

Strayhorn's mother and father, forced to live in working-class poverty in Pittsburgh, were both born Southerners. His mother attended Shaw University and was a stickler for elocution, as evidenced by Strayhorn's own preoccupation with eloquence and proper speaking; and his father grew up in a home of music and art. This explains in part Strayhorn's own predilection for music, as well as his middlebrow respect for high cultural attainments. When he showed a talent for music, his mother encouraged him: it could lead to better work than what most black men could get at the time. Besides, Strayhorn was a small, sensitive boy who hardly seemed fit for the rough-and-tumble workaday world of the average black male of the day. By the time the shy Strayhorn reached high school, he was already known as a composer and player of the piano and had clearly expressed the desire to be a classical musician.

Strayhorn did not grow up in an all-black neighborhood, nor did he attend all-black schools. He did not, as a youth, think of personal limitations in racial terms. He does not seem to have encountered racism before or during his high school days, or any sort of discrimination that would have dissuaded him from the pursuit of a career in classical music. In his later years, he became friendly with Martin Luther King Jr. and a passionate supporter of the civil rights movement; but in his youth, race did not seem an issue for him. In any case, as many commentators have pointed out, jazz and the popular music entertainment industry had developed to such an extent that many black musicians were able to work regularly. This seems to have been so for Strayhorn in the 1930s in Pittsburgh, where (Hajdu tells us) he fronted an integrated band that seemed able to find employment in the black and the white sections of town. (Strayhorn preferred the white clubs.)

By this time, however, Strayhorn seems to have lost the ambition to become a classical performer. He was "drifting," to use his own term, and was not quite committed to becoming a professional musician. Still, he was composing and performing with persistence. He became famous in Pittsburgh for a musical show that he wrote shortly after he finished Westinghouse High School called "Fantastic Rhythm." The influence of Gershwin was obvious; and his high school performed it in 1935. The Strayhorn standard "My Little Brown Book" came from this show.

In 1936, Strayhorn wrote "Lush Life," his most famous tune—the song, it is said, that Frank Sinatra loves but cannot sing. The lyrics were an uneven mixture of overwriting and understatement, but they revealed much about the kind of persona that Strayhorn was drawn to, world-weary, disaffected, cosmopolitan, a bit self-pitying, a persona that he was eventually to adopt. With this song Strayhorn showed that he could write popular songs with original and clever melodies, as well as lyrics that could combine sophistication with emotional weight:

> Romance is mush
> Stifling those who strive.
> I'll live a lush life in some small dive
> And there I'll be while I rot with the rest
> Of those whose lives are lonely too.

That is one of the loveliest stanzas in American popular music.

Strayhorn's taste in jazz was developed by two white friends—Bill Esch, with whom he studied arranging, and Mickey Scrima, with whom he played—and it was in this musical idiom that Strayhorn came to think that he might be able to write urbane, complex music that could make use of his classical bent. It is important to remember that this was less than twenty years after the first jazz recording: the development of jazz as a technical and aesthetic form, and its ability to attract young musicians commercially and artistically, had been astonishingly rapid. Jazz was also a powerful socializer of young people, especially ambitious but sensitive young men with an artistic flair who wanted their taste taken seriously. It was a good way for Strayhorn to meet people like himself.

Strayhorn was introduced to Duke Ellington, as a favor, on December 1, 1938, by George Greenlee, Gus Greenlee's nephew. Gus Greenlee was a big-time black Pittsburgh power, a bootlegger, nightclub owner, numbers runner and general urban entrepreneur, who was very impressed with the local boy's talent and believed that he was getting nowhere fast in Pittsburgh. Ellington was 39 years old, leader of the one of the most famous big bands in the country, with several star players including Harry Carney, Johnny Hodges, Cootie Williams and Barney Bigard, an established composer and arranger of greater magnitude and accomplishment than any other big band leader in the country. In 1938, Aaron Copland called Ellington "the master of them all," referring to jazz composers.

By the time Strayhorn was introduced to Ellington, the bandleader had already composed "Black and Tan Fantasy," "Creole Love Call," "Daybreak Express," "Drop Me Off in Harlem," "East St. Louis Toodle-O," "In a Sentimental Mood," "It Don't Mean a Thing," "Mood Indigo," "Reminiscing in Tempo," "Solitude," "Sophisticated Lady," "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" and "Rocking in Rhythm." Ellington would have gone down in history as a major figure in jazz if he never met Strayhorn. And everywhere he went Ellington was harassed by well-meaning friends and fans who wanted him to meet the local boy musician who knocked them dead at the high school, the church social, the local dance clubs. Yet Ellington decided to use Strayhorn.

"The very first thing he did was to hand me two pieces and tell me to arrange them," Strayhorn said in an inter-



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view years later. "They were both for Johnny Hodges. 'Like a Ship in the Night' and 'Savoy Strut,' I think. I couldn't really arrange, but that didn't make any difference to him. He inspires you with confidence. That's the only way I can explain how I managed to do those arrangements. They both turned out quite well. He took them just the way they were." No matter who joined his band, Ellington never ceased to be himself and his band never ceased to have his sound; but Strayhorn, the bassist Jimmy Blanton and the tenor saxophonist Ben Webster joined the Ellington band within a year of each other and each, in his own way, had a radical effect on Ellington's work.

What did Ellington see in the 23-year-old Strayhorn? Three things, I think. For a start, Strayhorn knew Ellington's music thoroughly, and also how to draw more from it than Ellington thought might have been there. Ellington saw him as someone who could freshen his conventions and his clichés. Also, Strayhorn was bright but not intrusive or excessively ambitious; he had been exposed to classical music and theory as well as to popular songs, and he had an ear for melody and lyrics, and these talents made him valuable as a kind of musical majordomo. Not many in the jazz world possessed the ability to work with music as broadly as Strayhorn did. Finally, Strayhorn had been around whites and was comfortable with them. He was not skittish about experiences beyond the ones that society may have prescribed for him. He was a creature of the larger culture, not the product of a black provincialism. Yet he was not, like Ellington, in any way uncomfortable with being black. Quite the contrary. His racial inheritance was a repository of cultural expressions to be artfully exploited.

These qualities appealed to Ellington, no doubt, because he saw some of his own qualities reflected in them. Together, until Strayhorn's death from cancer in 1967, these men went on to make some of the most important jazz music produced in the United States, including "A Drum Is a Woman," "The Far East Suite" and "Such Sweet Thunder." Strayhorn himself did such tunes as "Bloodcount," "Upper Manhattan Medical Group," "Passion Flower," "Raincheck," "Mid-Riff," "Lotus Blossom" and "A Flower Is a Lovesome Thing"—not merely standards in the Ellington book but jazz classics performed by generations of musicians.

Strayhorn was addicted to alcohol and to cigarettes, self-destructive habits that shortened his life. And he was a homosexual man in a homophobic world. One is tempted to say that Strayhorn was a doomed figure, destroyed by an insensitive world. But that is too easy and too romantic. He was a very well-liked man, and there is something about his excesses that seem like childish appetites gone bad. He was also a very optimistic man. "Ever up and onward": this was one of his favorite phrases, and the perfect idiom of his black bourgeois striving (the present participle of the verb that he used famously in "Lush Life") temperament. So his unhappiness was not unalloyed.

Perhaps Strayhorn drank and smoked to excess because people in the jazz world generally did, and perhaps they were all unhappy, all insecure, all led easily astray by the extravagance of their theatrical gestures. But the source of this unhappiness, this insecurity, this failed elegance is difficult to pin down. Ellington was a genius. Strayhorn, extraordinarily talented, was not a genius. His was the story of a gifted man who played around with his gifts, not the story of a man who would be great at all costs. Was he insecure about how Ellington felt about him, how Ellington measured his worth? Did Strayhorn feel that he was not exploiting his own gifts well? Was he finally frustrated working with Ellington? What sort of music did he really want to make, if it was not the music he was making with Ellington? And what sort of music could he really make, if he would? Hajdu's serviceable biography answers these questions not as thoroughly as one might like, but better than anyone so far has answered them. In its strengths and its weaknesses, Hajdu's book points up the need for serious scholarship and criticism about the men and women who were part of Ellington's world.

For the real subject here is not just the development of a crucial American art, but also the idea of Representative American Negroes, to borrow the title of Paul Laurence Dunbar's essay of 1903. In some ways, Ellington and probably Strayhorn saw themselves as being such representative figures. "To have achieved something for the betterment of his race rather than for the aggrandizement of himself, seems to be a man's best title to be called representative," wrote Dunbar. Both Ellington and Strayhorn took their race responsibilities seriously. And they took their art seriously as well, by considering it a racial expression that transcends race.

The life and career of Billy Strayhorn is not merely about his artistic achievements. It is also about the manner in which his integrity authenticated his art. Despite his self-effacing mannerisms, Strayhorn fought vigorously for himself, against the Ellington maw, by being one of Ellington's uniquely irreplaceable stars. And he fought against the conventions of jazz, by not wallowing in sentimentality or fake Negro soulisms. And he fought against the taboos of his society. He never hid his homosexuality or his "pagan" excesses. A lesser man would not have survived the prejudices that his marginalities generated, just as a lesser man would not have survived Ellington's powerful personality. But Ellington would not have wanted a lesser man for his alter ego. Ellington sensed Strayhorn's strength. Strayhorn was a remarkable technician and a craftsman of exceptional skill, but he was more than that. He was a black person making black music in a white, democratic country. Blacks in America are forever conscious that they are also an invention, and they are often at the mercy of this self-consciousness, of this sensation of representativeness. But one validates one's blackness only when one validates one's individuality, one's humanity. What any black person wishes finally to be, in this land of tragic and comic minstrelsy, is himself.

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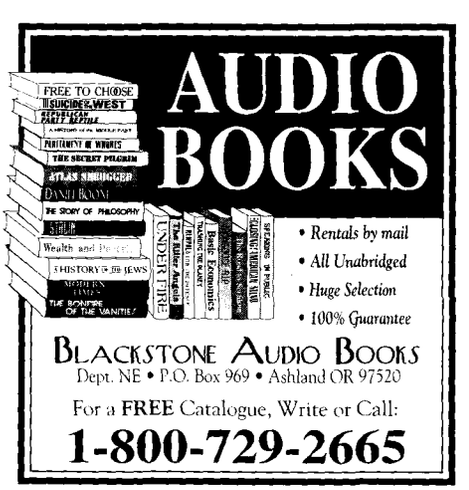
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# TELLURIDE DIARIST

## Camera ready

LIKE ASPEN, TELLURIDE BEGAN AS a gold-mining town, as its name—taken from a compound in which the element is found—indicates. But most of the gold has long since been panned (or dredged, or whatever), and for decades now Telluride's identity has been as a choice skiing spot, less elegant than its other Colorado-Idaho-Utah competitors and less crowded. But, when you've built a service infrastructure for the winter, you've also got to give it function and income the rest of the year. The locals have to eat, and those out-of-staters who've built expensive houses in the neighborhood need something to do. So Aspen was made into an all-purpose, all-season cultural and conference center. In mid-summer, for example, it's as if the entire Council on Foreign Relations has moved, like the Raj from Delhi to Kashmir, to higher altitudes, and the mountains fill with talk about weighty matters like Bosnia and unconventional weapons. A more modest place, Telluride has attracted some serious chamber music and, early this month for the twenty-third successive year, a film festival.

ASIDE FROM POPPING IN ON A movie or two during celluloid jamborees in Boston or New York, the only other festival I've ever attended was in Jerusalem, a much grander event, with perhaps 150 films. My wife and I came to Telluride to celebrate with a generous and imaginative friend who puts up the money to annually convert a high school gym into a grand Egyptian-revival movie palace. We saw thirteen films in four days, going to the first screening at 9 a.m. and the last near midnight, but still missed fifteen or sixteen others. The gala's message: artistically riveting and intellectually exacting films can be made for less than, say, $3 million. Such movies do not depend on pyrotechnics for effect. The scripts need to be memorable, the photography at once transporting and to human scale. Oh, and the actors must be able to act.

OTHER THAN SHIRLEY MACLAINE, who was being honored for—can you believe it?—forty years of acting, and Candice Bergen, to whose late husband, Louis Malle (director of *Lacombe Lucien*, *Au Revoir les Enfants*, *Murmur of the Heart* and *Vanya on 42nd Street*), this entire festival was dedicated, there were not many big stars here; I saw no one with a cellular phone. This may not be good news for the aspiring talents who'd come with first films. But there were some heavy players, some of them doing routine, even menial jobs as volunteers. One was Ken Burns, whose civil war and baseball series prove that the medium is no intrinsic impediment to seriousness. Watch for his three-hour documentary on Thomas Jefferson early next year. And watch for his essay on Jefferson in these pages before that. We saw three classic French productions: Jacques Becker's 40-year-old *Le Trou* (*The Hole*), a taut and true film about five prisoners trying to dig themselves out of a Paris prison, which was never released in this country; Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samourai* with Alain Delon (1967), also never distributed in the U.S., an exquisitely stylized gangster drama; and Alain Cavalier's *Therese* (1986), a magnificently minimalist depiction of a life of renunciation in the church. These films first came out when, we thought, everything French (or anything European, for that matter) was being shown in America. It wasn't. And, now that almost nothing from abroad finds a distributor here, imagine what we are missing.

THE DANISH DIRECTOR LARS VON Trier has found a U.S. distributor for *Breaking the Waves*, which crashed through Cannes this year, winning prizes and plaudits. (I'd seen only one of his other films, *Zentropa*, which had a steady run in the dwindling American cities with what we used to call art houses.) Obsessed with the disintegration of structures, the incoherence of ideas, the destabilization of character, in his new movie von Trier revisits old questions like God and miracles, sacrifice, good and evil. It was the first film we saw, and we were still talking about it on our last day in town.

*KOLYA* IS A CZECH FILM BY JAN Sverak, whose actor father plays the lead and wrote the screenplay. A 5-year-old Russian boy plays opposite him in a performance that is nothing short of mesmerizing. Touched with comedy, this is an emotional movie. But it is not sentimental, and it won a bigger audience in Prague than did *Forrest Gump*. I knew that the Czechs (and the Poles) have produced artistically (and sometimes politically) liberating films, even under tyranny. But I was surprised to see that, with the break-up of the heavily policed Soviet picture industry, a Kazakh director, Darezhan Omirbaev, working almost without a national cinema tradition, produced *Cardiogram*, a national work of universal valence, about the cruelty of children. But *Kolya* and *Cardiogram* are post-dictatorship productions. Some of the most emancipating movies are still made right under the boot of the tyrants. A few Chinese directors seem able to make movies dazzlingly hostile to the party and its history. Of course, much of what they produce isn't shown in China or is shown with the most provocative parts left on the cutting-room floor. The same is true in Cuba, and in much of the Middle East. So the most surprising presentation in Telluride was *Gabbeh*, made by the Iranian filmmaker Moshen Makhamalbaf, who, jailed by the Shah, is in and out of trouble with his successors. Of the Islamic tradition, and hostile to its enforcers, *Gabbeh* is a lushly conveyed love story. I don't know whether it has been shown in Tehran.

THE FILM THAT STIRRED me most, and also stirred the most discussion in Telluride, was *Riot*, a four-segment fiction piece, Rashomon-style, about the 1993 Los Angeles riots. Each of the ethnocentric segments was done by a different director, a Latino, an Asian, a black and a white, and, of course, each had a more than slightly different take on the events. But this is one film, and by the end you see how all the main characters have touched each other, some by killing. Galen Yuen, the Sino-American director, told the audience that, in South Central L.A., he felt like a white man, he carried a gun, and, while working in his family's liquor store, there wasn't a day when he didn't have to pull the piece on a black thug. The African American sequence, which starred the only well-knowns (Cicely Tyson and Mario and Melvin Van Peebles), powerfully reproduces that population's gender and generational conflicts. Giving despair its due, it offers middle-class self-discipline as a potential instrument of change. But there aren't many takers. The Anglo section focuses on an especially sympathetic cop, torn by his ability to see many sides clearly. The Latino portion, directed by Alex Munoz (Irish mother, Mexican father), was the most subtle story, morally laden, psychologically dense and sociologically complicated. Don't get me wrong: this was nc social science treatise. Munoz and his particular cast of five have produced a true and beautiful narrative. Will *Rio* find a distributor? If it does it will surely find an audience, a large one.

**MARTIN PERETZ**



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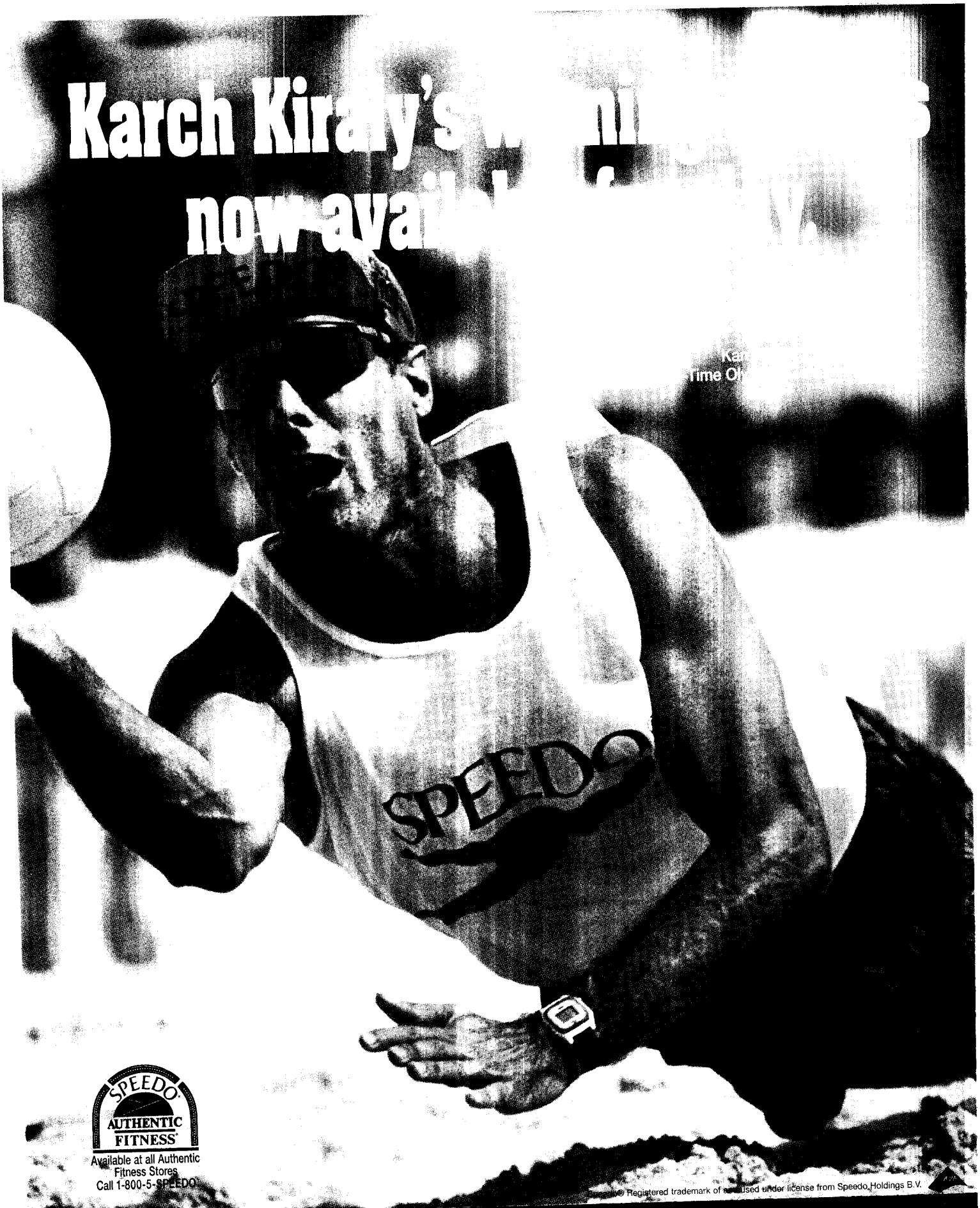


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